Transforming News: A Theological and Critical Analysis of Contemporary Christian News Handling in the Light of the Apostle Paul's Corinthian Hardship Narratives

Philip Plyming

Thesis submitted for the degree of PhD by research

University of Edinburgh

2008

I confirm that this thesis has been composed by me and is the result of my own work. It has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification.

CONTENTS

ABSTRACT

In this thesis I consider the contribution that the apostle Paul can make to a theological critique of Christian news handling. In the opening chapter I describe the complex context in which Christian communicators, both professional and lay, find themselves handling news stories, and suggest why their task is a demanding one, not least because of the significant theological questions it raises. I conclude that such a critique of this communicative practice is overdue.

The study then proceeds in two stages. In part one I make the case for including Paul in a research field where he has until now been overlooked, and then discuss a number of texts in the apostle's Corinthian correspondence which focus on his own hardship and suffering. I suggest that these passages are not only examples of Paul handling news but also, when read in the light of 1 Corinthians 2:1-5, indicate a theologically coherent approach to this practice on the part of the apostle. I conclude that the Corinthian hardship narratives involve an understanding of news handling that can be described as cruciform, that is, informed both in style and content by the cross of Christ.

In the second part of the thesis I use this Pauline model to inform a critique of two examples of contemporary news handling, analysed using qualitative research methodology: the Church of England's handling of its own attendance statistics, and the newspaper *Alpha News*, published by Holy Trinity Brompton. Through interviews with those responsible for handling the news, textual analysis and focus group-led reception analysis, I explore the wider issues raised by each example of news handling and then show how a model of cruciform news can shed significant theological light on these issues and thus the challenges facing the faithful Christian communicator. I conclude that the apostle Paul has a distinctive and significant contribution to make to contemporary Christian news handling, and that a cruciform model of news might help transform our understanding of this important communicative practice.

NOTES AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Unless otherwise stated, scripture quotations in this thesis are from the New Revised Standard Version.

I would like to express my thanks to my two supervisors, Dr Jolyon Mitchell and Prof. Larry Hurtado for their guidance and support during this research project. I am also grateful to the Revd Dr Richard Turnbull and the people of Christ Church, Chineham, together with the Diocese of Winchester, for giving me the time and financial support to study part-time. The congregation and staff team at Holy Trinity Claygate also gave me much encouragement, space and support during the final stages of this thesis, and I express my gratitude to them as well. Finally, my thanks go to Jem Salter for correcting a final draft of this thesis and above all to my wife Annabelle for her ongoing attention to detail, encouragement and love.

INTRODUCTION

Focus and Aim

This study examines the way in which the apostle Paul's communicative practice, as evidenced in certain texts from the Corinthian correspondence, might inform a theological critique of contemporary Christian news handling, that is, the process by which Christian communicators, both professional and lay, share a range of news stories within and outside the church. The central thesis is that Paul has an important, and previously underrated, contribution to make to a theological understanding of a communicative practice that is of growing significance and complexity within the Christian church today. Within a rapidly changing and increasingly challenging news culture Christians find themselves dealing with stories in a variety of contexts, for example managing contacts with the secular press, relating news to church members and supporters, and sharing stories as part of a publicity programme. It is my belief, however, that there are theological implications of this practice which have yet to be fully explored. The aim of this thesis is to demonstrate how the apostle Paul might assist theological reflection in an area which has previously been regarded erroneously as a matter of purely practical interest.

My argument is advanced by discussing, first, the nature of news and news handling within contemporary society and its expression within parts of the Christian church. Second, I argue that the apostle Paul is in a unique position to provide a theological framework for a critique of Christian news handling, and that there are enough similarities between the first century and contemporary context to make a theological investigation worthwhile. In making the case for looking at Paul I outline the range of stories which the apostle found himself handing, and outline why the Corinthian hardship narratives are deserving of further study. Third, I analyse Paul's understanding of communication as expressed in 1 Corinthians 2:1-5 and set it in its Corinthian context, before examining, fourth, Paul's theological

priorities in sharing news as seen in the hardship narratives of 1 and 2 Corinthians. Fifth, the nature of Paul's audience and their likely response to his news is analysed, before an attempt is made to sum up an overall model of Paul's communicative theory and method as may be discerned in the Corinthian texts. Sixth, and as introduction to the second half of the thesis, I outline how this model might be employed as a critical framework within a contemporary context. This contemporary context is examined through two case studies of news handling undertaken by Christians in the last couple of years; the texts in question are analysed using qualitative research methodology and then subjected to a theological critique informed by Paul's own understanding of news, as drawn from the texts under consideration. The aim is to demonstrate through this argument how Paul might assist theological reflection not only in the two specific areas under discussion but also in the wider field of news handling and contemporary communication.

Background

The academic fields from which this research flows are discussed immediately below and elsewhere, but at this stage a few words of personal introduction might illustrate where this research focus has come from and leads to. Throughout my theological training and now six years in pastoral ministry, I have found myself returning to two questions.

First, should Christians not be thinking more critically about the way they handle news, and in particular whether they need in so doing to be distinctive from prevailing culture? As I have listened to, and received communication from, Christian individuals and organisations sharing news about themselves, in articles, sermons, and personal correspondence, I have been struck by how their stories show many of the hallmarks of a contemporary culture of marketing and spin: a relentless upbeat nature, a denial of any struggle or hardship, a focus on success and

achievement.[1] It seems clear that some Christians are frequently not thinking deeply about the theological implications of their communication, either in terms of what their communication says about their faith, or what impact it has on those who hear such stories, particularly those living with an area of brokenness in their lives. With my pastoral experience of the sort of news that is helpful to build an honest and authentic Christian community, I am left asking whether Christians might not be called to handle news in a distinctive way and in a way that conforms more closely to the content of their identity and mission.

The second question that has returned to me as I have read the scriptures is why in his letters the apostle Paul chose repeatedly to share news of his own suffering. Paul exercised a position of some power among the early Christians, and yet unlike many leaders and groups in today's church he chose to reveal news about himself which showed himself to be weak and vulnerable. While Paul is sometimes characterised as a strong and controlling leader, I was struck by how he chose to reveal more about his own struggles than many other biblical writers. Is this simply an attempt by the apostle to make the congregations feel sorry for him, or is there a deeper, more satisfactory, explanation? In the light of my first question, I found myself asking whether Paul had not in fact understood something very important about communication and handling news, and that perhaps his was a voice which in the current climate of spin needed to be heard.

As I began to examine what research had been done in these areas, I found not only that there was little appreciation of the theological issues raised by Christians handling news, but also that the apostle Paul was largely overlooked by those

---

[1] See further discussion on spin in chapter one. I refer there to a dissertation I wrote on the phenomenon of spin and Christian ethics, from which the wider questions discussed in this thesis have, in part, flowed. I recognise the limitations of the term 'spin' but argue that it has a use in describing the contemporary communicative landscape. Philip Plyming, "'...and neither do they spin...': Christian Communication and the Ethics of Spin" (Unpublished dissertation for Diploma in Ministerial Studies, University of Durham, 2001).

seeking to examine communication from a theological perspective. I also discovered, however, that some work had been done, both in the sphere of religious news and rhetorical criticism of Paul, which suggested that the path of bringing together Paul with contemporary Christian news handling would be a profitable one and of some value for the wider academic sphere. Although the interdisciplinary nature of this study means that it actually draws on a number of existing areas of academic research, some of which will be discussed at appropriate points in the thesis, it is helpful to highlight the two research areas already mentioned on which this study seeks to build.

Religious News

The last decade has seen a growing scholarly interest in news about religion. Studies by Silk (1995), Stout & Buddenbaum (1996, 1998) and Hoover (1998) have highlighted the lack of previous research concerning how news about religion is reported, and have addressed a range of questions concerning the media and organised religion: whether the media has a liberal bias against traditional religious values, how journalists frame their reporting of religious news, what the audience for news about religion is, and why news about the church is not seen as 'proper' news by news editors.[2] As well as more general texts on the interaction between the news media and religion there have been specific studies on how individual news stories were reported, and aspects of the subtleties of the reporting of religious news have been revealed.[3] News about religion is now regarded as an important and

---

[2] Mark Silk, *Unsecular Media: Making News of Religion in America* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1995); Judith M. Buddenbaum, *Reporting News about Religion: an Introduction for Journalists* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1998); Daniel A. Stout and Judith M. Buddenbaum, *Religion and Mass Media: Audiences and Adaptations* (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: SAGE, 1996); Stewart M. Hoover, *Religion in the News: Faith and Journalism in American Public Discourse* (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: SAGE, 1998). As these studies have been on religious news in the United States, 'religious' is generally understood as synonymous with 'Christian'.

[3] Daniel A. Stout and Judith M. Buddenbaum, "Media, Religion and "Framing"," *Journal of Media and Religion* 2, no. 1 (2003) Cynthia A. McCune, "Framing Reality: Shaping the News Coverage of the 1996 Tennessee Debate of Teaching Evolution," *Journal of Media and Religion*

complex area to study, one which reflects the changing relationship between the Christian church and society. The recent volume edited by Clare Hoertz Badaracco is a good example of the fruits of this scholarly interest;[4] it takes an interdisciplinary approach to religious news and brings together academics and journalists to reflect together on the reporting and function of religious news.

There remains, however, a part of this research field which has been largely neglected in scholarly discourse, namely the role of Christian organisations and their employed communication professionals in the news handling process. Scholars have tended to focus on the work of journalists on the one hand and the reception by the audience on the other, and have thus overlooked the work of the men and women charged with the responsibility of handling such news, and the culture of the organisation in which they work. Not only does this approach underestimate the important role played by such people in the communicative process, a role that has been acknowledged in secular studies of news and news handling,[5] it also neglects an area of considerable theological interest. In chapter one I argue that as they play their part in the news handling process Christian communicators find themselves facing a range of questions which are related to Christian faith, questions of reputation, truth-telling, vulnerability and power. How their response to these questions is informed by their faith and that of the organisation which they represent is an area which, I will argue, is of substantial importance. Such was the finding of a study in 1974 of communications policy in the Roman Catholic Church in the Republic of Ireland following the Second Vatican

---

2, no. 1 (2003) Chiung Hwang Chen, "'Molympics'? Journalistic Discourse of Mormons in Relation to the 2002 Winter Olympic Games," *Journal of Media and Religion* 2, no. 1 (2003).

[4] Claire Hoertz Badaracco, ed., *Quoting God: How Media Shape Ideas about Religion and Culture* (Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 2005).

[5] See the work on the interaction between the people handling the news about the AIDS crisis in the 1980s and the messages that were produced and received. David Miller and others, *The Circuit of Mass Communication: Media Strategies, Representation and Audience Reception in the AIDS Crisis*, Glasgow Media Group (London: SAGE, 1998).

Council;[6] although he writes as a journalist and not a theologian John Cooney identifies the crucial role that the theological developments post-Vatican II played in the changes in news handling policy of the church in Ireland. Cooney examines in detail the Vatican II document *Inter Mirifica* and its more influential successor *Communio et Progessio* and traces the way in which the theological emphases of these documents – the place of mission and the importance of dialogue – had practical implications for the way the church dealt with news about itself. Although more recent studies have hinted at the link between an organisation's news handling and implied Christian belief, there has been no systematic development of Cooney's work.[7] This study takes as its initial premise that in the sphere of religious news a theological critique of how a Christian organisation handles news is long overdue.

Rhetorical Criticism in Pauline Studies

The last twenty-five years have seen a growth in the attention given by Pauline scholars to the use by the apostle of prevailing rhetorical forms in the structuring of his letters. Building on the foundational work undertaken by Hans-Dieter Betz, and especially his work on Galatians, research has focussed on the extent to which Paul

---

[6] John Cooney, *No News is Bad News: Communications Policy in the Catholic Church* (Dublin: Veritas, 1974).

[7] See a study on the paedophile crisis in the Roman Catholic Church in the United States and an examination of the role played by those responsible for engaging with the media during the crisis in Philip Jenkins, *Pedophiles and Priests: Anatomy of a Contemporary Crisis* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996). Jenkins argues that many years of favourable media coverage had left the Roman Catholic church ill-equipped, both in terms of structures and personnel, to deal with the onslaught of criticism they received. Stuart Hoover also recognises the role that the values of a religious organisation can play in the dissemination of religious news. He argues that religious communicators have fundamental decisions to make about how visible they want to be in the public sphere, and that this affects in the same way the amount of news that is available to be reported. See Stewart M. Hoover, "Mass Media and Religious Pluralism," in *The Democratization of Communication*, ed. Philip Lee (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1995). Yet neither of these texts asks the further, and more important, question about how the way a religious organisation behaves relates to its own theological and ethical framework.

utilised classical rhetorical categories in his writing.[8] Studies have argued for an understanding of his letters as expositions of classical rhetoric;[9] Ben Witherington's work on 1 and 2 Corinthians is a good example of an approach which uses an analysis of rhetorical form to shape a reading of those two epistles.[10] Witherington believes that by tracing the structures Paul uses in his writing it is possible to come closer to the heart of his argument and message. Rhetorical criticism has been an area of growing significance within Pauline studies, and is understood to allow the reader to engage in a detailed way with the structures and techniques of argumentation employed by the apostle.

Yet from this broad sweep of research two interesting questions emerge. First, notwithstanding the similarities between the form of Paul's argument and certain rhetorical models, to what extent did the apostle try to differentiate himself from the prevailing rhetorical practice? As I explore in more depth in chapter three, some recent studies have highlighted the way in which Paul sought to distance himself in particular from the forms of rhetoric he encountered in the city of Corinth.[11] Bruce Winter argues that Paul's communicative approach evident in the Corinthian letters is a renunciation of the sophistic rhetoric so popular in that city;[12] the apostle chooses to communicate in a fundamentally different way to the rhetorical mood of

---

[8] H.D. Betz, *Galatians* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979). See also a useful overview in George A. Kennedy, *New Testament Interpretation through Rhetorical Criticism* (Chapel Hill, NC.: University of North Carolina Press, 1984).

[9] M.M. Mitchell, *Paul and the Rhetoric of Reconciliation: An Exegetical Investigation of the Language and Composition of 1 Corinthians*, Hermeneutische Untersuchungen zur Theologie; 28 (Tübingen: Mohr, 1991); L.L. Welborn, *Politics and Rhetoric in the Corinthian Epistles* (Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 1997).

[10] Ben Witherington, *Conflict and Community in Corinth: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1995).

[11] Duane Litfin, *St. Paul's Theology of Proclamation: 1 Corinthians 1-4 and Greco-Roman Rhetoric*, Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series 79 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Michael A. Bullmore, *St. Paul's Theology of Rhetorical Style: an Examination of 1 Corinthians 2.1-5 in Light of First Century Greco-Roman Rhetorical Culture* (San Francisco: International Scholars, 1995).

[12] Bruce W. Winter, *Philo and Paul among the Sophists*, Society of New Testament Studies 96 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

the day. Winter concludes that the findings of rhetorical criticism need to be balanced by an appreciation of how Paul eschewed certain rhetorical practices because they ran contrary to the gospel he was preaching.[13]

Second, it remains to be fully explored how the insights from such study into Paul's communicative practice might inform a contemporary understanding of Christian communication. It is perhaps not surprising that this has not been attempted by New Testament scholars working within their field of research; however, as I explain at greater length in chapter two, Paul is also usually overlooked by theologians seeking a resource for their own reflection on matters of communication. It remains the case, however, that the fruits of Pauline rhetorical criticism, and particularly the recent work arguing for Paul's critical distance from certain forms of rhetoric – a distance maintained for theological reasons – suggest that Paul thought deeply and carefully about communication in a complex rhetorical context and thus could serve well as a theological resource for Christians communicating today. This study seeks to build on these existing findings of rhetorical criticism and suggest how Paul's communicative example might be of relevance in a contemporary context.

Parameters

It is important to be clear about the specific parameters of any given study, and this is particularly the case with an interdisciplinary thesis where the focus must remain especially tight. In setting the limitations to this study I am seeking to avoid two extremes, namely on the one hand covering too much ground with the result that any findings tend towards superficiality, and on the other examining too little data to produce conclusions of any significance or wider relevance. As far as this present study is concerned, there are four particular boundaries to bear in mind.

---

[13] Ibid., 237-241.

First, this study is not an attempt to describe what the entire Pauline corpus has to say about the apostle's communicative theory and method. Such a survey would seem to offer the opportunity for wide-ranging conclusions about Paul's handling of news; there is not, however, the space in this study to undertake such an examination to the depth required for substantive conclusions to be reached, even if focus is restricted to the uncontested letters. Instead the focus will be on the two extant letters to the church in Corinth, and in particular on those texts within that correspondence where Paul narrates stories of his own suffering. The rationale for looking at these areas of the Corinthian corpus is outlined in detail in chapter two. I will argue not only that news about his hardship is the most characteristic form of narrative which Paul found himself handling, and that the overwhelming majority of these stories are found in 1 and 2 Corinthians, but also that the context of the Corinthian church – both sociologically and in terms of rhetorical environment – bears significant similarities to the context in which Christian communicators are operating today, and thus the example of Paul carries particular resonance for this study.

Second, I will not be arguing that the two case-studies I examine in the second half of this thesis raise all the issues involved in Christian news handling today. While such an analysis would no doubt be of considerable interest, a more thorough assessment of the practice of contemporary news handling would require a longer survey of a number of examples of communication, and would involve the shifting of the focus of this study to a more empirical and less biblical approach. Nevertheless, I will be seeking to demonstrate that the two case-studies do raise theological issues of wider relevance within contemporary Christian communication, and thus have an application beyond their own immediate context.

Third, I am not attempting in this study a general ethical or theological critique of Christian news handling. To follow this path would be to open up a number of important and interesting questions, including, for example, the nature of truth-

telling within contemporary communicative practice. Stimulating though such an examination would be, it must remain for reasons of space and focus outside the remit of this present study, whose focal point instead is what the apostle Paul, and in particular his news handling as evidenced in the Corinthian corpus, has to contribute by way of a framework for a theological critique. In this sense, therefore, it is important to be clear that this study is not in the tradition of other communication ethics studies, in which general ethical principles are applied to the complexities of contemporary communication.[14]

Finally, I am not envisaging that the conclusions to this study will include a number of practical recommendations for Christians engaged in handling news. The aim of the Pauline critique of contemporary practice is not primarily to show how practitioners might *do* things differently, but rather to demonstrate how their and others' thinking and reflection on their own communicative behaviour might be informed and enriched by the example of the apostle Paul. In so arguing I am not suggesting that the conclusions will be devoid of practical relevance; indeed, as someone engaged in preaching and church leadership I hope that all theological reflection will have some practical application. Nevertheless, the aim of this thesis is theological engagement with some of the challenges of handling news and not simply a revision of certain specific current practices.

Areas of Contribution

The above parameters notwithstanding I believe this study has the potential to make a significant contribution to three research fields. First, while I am not suggesting that this study will break substantial new ground with respect to Pauline studies, it will hopefully represent an innovative way of harvesting existing data and using it in a new context. In demonstrating how Paul's communicative

---

[14] See for example Clifford G. Christians and Michael Traber, eds., *Communication Ethics and Universal Values* (London: SAGE, 1997).

behaviour has a relevance beyond the relatively narrow sphere of rhetorical criticism I will show how the Pauline corpus has much to contribute beyond its first-century context, thereby opening up the possibility of further areas of dialogue between the apostle and contemporary theology and practice. Although the conclusions in this study will only be in respect to the Corinthian correspondence, the implications for wider Pauline studies will hopefully remain.

Second, this study will highlight an important area of theological engagement within the field of religious news. Not only will it emphasise the role played by Christian communicators in the news process and thus address an oversight within much writing on religious news, it will also form a challenge to those writers on Christian news handling who regard the communicative task as primarily a practical exercise in writing press releases and forming good contacts.[15] This study will argue for the primacy of a theological approach to handling news, and suggest that all practical considerations are subservient to this model.

Third, within the sphere of communication theology and ethics this study will argue for the apostle Paul to be taken seriously as a resource for theological reflection. His absence from contemporary thinking in this area represents, I will argue, a *lacuna* which would benefit from being recognised by those seeking to describe a distinctively Christian approach to communication. In acknowledging the discontinuity between Paul's world and ours, I will also suggest that the significant areas of common interest and concern render him of more scholarly interest than has often hitherto been exhibited. Indeed, on a wider canvas it is hoped that this study will function as a more general paradigm of the engagement possible between the world of the New Testament and contemporary culture.

---

[15] For more on this see chapter one.

Structure

This study is divided into two parts: Part A examines the apostle Paul's approach to handling news as revealed in the hardship narratives in the Corinthian correspondence, and its general shape has already been outlined in this introduction. The aim of this half of the thesis is to discern what the textual evidence reveals about Paul's theological priorities in handling news. Part B comprises an attempt to make a connection between these theological priorities and the empirical realities facing Christians engaged in news handling today. This takes the form of two examples of news handling which are examined as case studies using qualitative research methodology; these case studies – the handling by the Church of England of its annual church attendance statistics, and *Alpha News*, the newspaper which publicises the Alpha Course throughout the UK – are assessed on a number of levels with the aim of discerning the key issues which lie behind each example of news handling.[16] These key issues are then subjected to theological reflection based on Paul's communicative theory and practice, and certain preliminary conclusions will be reached. The study ends with wider conclusions being reached about the nature of a Pauline contribution to a theological understanding of contemporary Christian news handling.

Before Part A, however, the study is introduced by a chapter which defines certain key terms such as news and news handling, and describes the challenging context in which all communicators handling news now operate. It is to this foundational work that we now turn.

---

[16] The choice of these two case studies will be justified at specific points in Part B.

1. NEWS: THE CONTEXT AND CHALLENGE FOR CHRISTIAN COMMUNICATORS

1.1. Introduction

So far the general parameters of this study have been outlined; this chapter forms the beginning of the detailed argument which is to follow. Its aim is to explore in more detail what is meant by 'Christian news handling', and why a theological critique of it as a practice is overdue. To this end I will first explore the nature of news in both its historical and contemporary context, before suggesting a working understanding of news which encompasses the full range of news within and about the Christian church. I will then briefly explore the meaning of the term 'news handling' and its practice by communicators within the church and associated bodies. I conclude by examining in more detail the changing and challenging context in which this news handling takes place and thus the reason why Christian news handling is an area of potential theological complexity.

1.2. Exploring News

1.2.1 Introduction and Historical context

In the United Kingdom at the beginning of the 21st century there is more news available than ever before. A basic survey of news television illustrates this fact: at the beginning of the 1980s there were only two television organisations supplying news to the country, with an average output of two hours a day; today the British television viewer is able to receive news from at least five organisations, with three of these producing 24 hour news.[1] Despite the recent downward trend in circulation figures across the board, newspapers are still widely read by a large

---

[1] Brian McNair, *News and Journalism in the UK: a Textbook*, 3rd ed. (London: Routledge, 1999), 3. The presence of 24 hour news channels such as Sky News and BBC News 24 has arguably changed fundamentally the landscape of broadcast news and its relationship to the audience; this category of channels rely on a 'news-hungry' culture in which viewers are understood not to be prepared to wait for news but to want it on demand.

cross-section of the British public and play a significant role in national and political life.[2] However, it is the development of the internet and digital technology which has had perhaps the most significant impact on news culture. News websites enable the consumer greater choice in accessing news and also enable news to be shared quickly without going via traditional news organisations; the growth of the blog movement has lead to the emergence of innovative patterns of news sharing. For all these developments and innovations it is actually far from clear whether the expansion of available news has been accompanied by an increase in the general appetite for news, or whether simply the pattern of consuming has changed. It has been argued that the hunger for news which once was satisfied by a twice daily diet of morning newspaper and evening television reporting is now met by grazing of the snack-form news all around us.[3] That may be the case, but the fact remains that news has undergone a revolution in recent years and is now more available and accessible than ever before.

It would be an error, however, to describe news as exclusively a recent phenomenon. It is tempting to see news as a modern invention; scholars who do so trace its beginning variously back to the birth of modern capitalism, the invention of the steam engine and the Jacksonian era.[4] This understanding is not supported by either an etymological or historical examination of the concept. The word 'news' comes from either the old French *noveles*, or the mediaeval Latin *nova*, both meaning 'new things'; it entered common usage around 500 years ago. Even then it was not really a new concept, as the word 'tidings' had expressed a broadly similar idea for several hundred years previously.[5]

---

[2] Alongside the gradual decline in newspaper readership there is a growing 'freesheet' newspaper sector, as advertisers realise the potential market for news in urban areas and make the newspapers available at no cost to the consumer.

[3] Ian Hargreaves, *Journalism: Truth or Dare?* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 2.

[4] Oliver Boyd-Barrett and Terhi Rantanen, "The Globalization of News," in *The Globalization of News*, ed. Oliver Boyd-Barrett and Terhi Rantanen (London: SAGE, 1998), 1; Martin Mayer, *Making News* (Harvard, Mass.: Harvard Business School Press, 1993), 2.

[5] This term is derived from the Norse.

Thus the broad idea of news predates by some considerable way the modern terms of 'information' and 'communication', which have only taken on their current meaning in the last 150 years.[6] Indeed, it has been argued that news as an idea has been around as long as humans have been able to communicate with each other. Jack Lule relates the modern idea of news to the ancient category of myth and argues that news is located in a longstanding tradition of mythic storytelling which is itself an essential part of what it is to be human.[7] Stephen Mitchell shows how news has flourished in every age of human development.[8] He narrates the story of how Cicero as proconsul in Cilicia received regular news from Caelius, a fellow politician back in Rome, who seemed to have semi-official newssheets to draw on. In a sign that the news environment has not changed that much, Cicero complained to Caelius that he was being sent much too much 'tittle-tattle' and wanted more real news.[9]

Further evidence of the longstanding concept of news is its place within the biblical canon. In an episode emblematic of the problems of ancient communication, King David waits to hear news of the fate of Absalom from his two messengers, Ahimaaz and a Cushite. After the confusing news from Ahimaaz, it is the news from the Cushite that Absalom is dead which sends David into his desperate grief (2 Samuel 18:19-33). The ministry of the anointed servant is described as bringing 'good news to the oppressed' (Isaiah 61:1). In the New Testament, although the word usually translated as the noun 'news' is actually a verb '*euangelizomai*', it is clearly news that the shepherds hear from the angels (Luke 2:10), and which Paul seeks to spread in his missionary activity (Acts 20:24). Of course, these examples from biblical and ancient history should not suggest that news has not changed in the course of

---

[6] Stephen Mitchell, *A History of News* (Fort Worth: Harcourt Brace, 1997), 2.

[7] Jack Lule, *Daily News, Eternal Stories: the Mythological Role of Journalism* (New York: Guildford Press, 1991), 3-4.

[8] Mitchell, *History of News*.

[9] Ibid., 53-58.

history. News has evolved alongside technological and other cultural developments, the invention of the printing press, the establishment of parliamentary democracy, the means of rapid transportation, the possibilities of radio, television and the computer age.[10] Indeed, it is possible to trace in the development of news and newspapers over the past 350 years the wider cultural and structural trends in the public sphere.[11] News looks very different now to even fifty years ago, but it stands as part of a long evolutionary tradition.

1.2.2 Defining News

If the above brief etymological and historical survey acts as a warning against thinking that news is something entirely novel, it also highlights a more profound and important question. The survey assumes that we know what 'news' is, that we will recognise it when we see it in the past and the present; this is very often not the case. There is considerable discussion about how news could be described and defined, and we will have to find a working definition with which to proceed for the purposes of this research. A preliminary definition of news is from the Oxford English Dictionary: 'the report or account of recent events or occurrences, brought or coming to one as new information; new occurrences as a subject of report or talk'.[12] This a helpful starting point not least because of the clarification that a story may not find its origin in the recent past but may still come to one 'as new information'. The two clauses in the OED definition, however, also set up a deeper distinction that needs to be addressed. The different definitions of news can be divided into two separate groups: those which treat news as a product (what the OED calls the 'report or account'), and those which treat news as an happening or event (what the OED refers to as an 'occurrence'). Put another way, this is a contrast between those who believe that news is a natural phenomenon in which stories

---

[10] Mayer, *Making News*, 2.

[11] Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Burger and with the assistance of Fredrick Lawrence (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1989).

[12] *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), 1324.

have inherent news value, and those who hold that news is rather what is constructed by media professionals working to certain bureaucratic and economic pressures. This contrast may also be expressed as a question: is something 'news' before it is reported?

It is not difficult to see why some argue for news to be understood as a product or a constructed commodity; it is clear that any item of reported news is not simply a description of an objective reality. Neil Postman and Steve Powers are right to warn against a naïve approach to news which sees news stories as simply 'out there', waiting to be gathered or collected.[13] Any news story has been written by a journalist according to certain journalistic preconceptions and conventions; it is selected and introduced in a style of the journalist's choosing. Furthermore, the news that is reported has been chosen according to certain criteria. The dozen or so items on the evening television news have been chosen by an editor with respect to the expected audience, the make-up of the rest of the programme, the editorial policy of the programme, the resources of the organisation and many other considerations. What is 'news' on any given night is a product of various competing interests and concerns; it has not come straight from reality onto the screen.[14] Referring specifically to television news, Jacques Ellul states this with characteristic vigour, 'An event is not news unless television carries it...When television stops dealing with a question, the question no longer exists.'[15]

To recognise this, however, is not necessarily to say that news should be understood simply as a product. Postman and Powers are overstating their case when they

---

[13] Neil Postman and Steve Powers, *How to Watch TV News* (London: Penguin, 1992), 14.

[14] Roger Fowler, *Language in the News: Discourse and Ideology in the Press* (London: Routledge, 1991), 222.

[15] Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Bluff*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1990), 333 quoted in Andrew Goddard, "Jacques Ellul and the Power of the Media," *Studies in Christian Ethics* 13, no. 1 (2000) 72.

claim, 'most news does not inhere in the event. An event becomes news.'[16] There are many stories which we would understand as 'news' before they are produced and packaged as a news item: the events of 11 September 2001, the election of a Prime Minister, a bomb attack in Iraq, extreme weather, the death of a film star, the result of a World Cup football match. To be sure, these examples of news will be packaged into news reports but there seems to be something inherent in them that makes them news before they are packaged and produced as such by the mass media. What this inherent element constitutes is notoriously difficult to define, but research on news values has proved helpful in this respect. Since the innovative study of foreign news in the Scandinavian media by Galtung and Ruge in the 1960s media researchers have sought to identify the news values which make a story news. These values are held by the media organisations, although crucially they are shared with, and indeed shaped by, the audience for news.[17] In essence, they are an attempt to describe what makes a story interesting, to explain what makes it news.[18]

1.2.3 News as Event, Story and Product

This 'news values' approach is a helpful corrective to an appreciation of news which simply understands it in its final presentation in a form of mass media; it recognises that news is not simply a product of news journalists, but something rather more complex, the result of a symbiotic relationship between the essential elements of a story, their correlation with certain news values prevalent in society and the

---

[16] Postman and Powers, *TV News*, 14.

[17] There is a growing understanding that the media audience is more active and creative than the myth of a passive recipient would suggest. An understanding of news which sees it purely as product fails to take account of this. See John B. Thompson, *The Media and Modernity: A Social Theory of the Media* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995), 38.

[18] Stuart Allan usefully summarises the news values which emerge in most studies of the Western media: conflict, relevance, timeliness, simplification, personalization, unexpectedness, continuity, composition, reference to elite nations, reference to elite persons, cultural specificity and negativity. Stuart Allan, *News Culture* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1999), 62ff. For more on news values see Allan Bell, *The Language of News Media* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), 155-160 and Herbert J. Gans, "Deciding What's News," in *News: A Reader*, ed. Howard Tumber (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 235-248.

framing chosen by specific media organisations. *Pace* Postman and Powers news is news because it is newsworthy, and not simply because it appears in the news media; news is often news before it is reported. I draw on the insights from this sphere of research in suggesting a three-fold understanding of news based around event, story and product. Below I explain this model and suggest why, despite its shortcomings, it will be a useful paradigm to bear in mind throughout this study.

Instead of trying to decide whether news is primarily something constructed by media organisations, or the result of shared news values, it seems to me helpful to develop a dynamic understanding of news which describes it as operating on three levels, as event, story and product.[19] To understand news as *event* is to refer to an actual occurrence which is potentially newsworthy; in different cultural contexts it might refer to the death of a famous person, the development of a new chemotherapy drug, the election of a local mayor, or some freak weather. In other words, there is usually a particular focus, bounded in space and time, that forms the basis to what we call news. News as *story* refers to the way an event is received and narrated by those directly affected by it; it involves an appreciation that while lots of events take place within any given community, only certain of them are so received as to become a story. The death of a famous person becomes a story when his significance was recognised by a particular community and thus his passing is noted.[20] The new local mayor is a story for those who will come under his or her influence; it is rarely a story for those at a distance from the city in question. Thus only certain news events become news stories. Finally, news as *product* refers to the event and resulting story as presented in a form of media, be it in mass media or other form. The development of a new chemotherapy drug constitutes both an event and story in itself, the end point in a long journey of research and testing

---

[19] I want to acknowledge a debt to my principal supervisor, Dr Jolyon Mitchell, who first encouraged me to understand news along these lines.

[20] Thus the demise of England cricketer Fred Truman was a big story in Yorkshire where he was widely known and fondly respected; but it was not a story the other side of the Atlantic in Bolivia (for example).

monitored by the academic and pharmaceutical community, but also a product when it is written up by the science editor of a national newspaper as the new 'cure' for cancer. A heatwave is a news event in its meteorological reality, a news story in the impact it has on vulnerable members of the community, and a news product when it is presented as a three-minute package on the nightly news. News as product refers to news in a permanent mediated form.

The above model is not intended as the final word on a contemporary understanding of news. It has certain significant shortcomings: the relationship between the three aspects of news I have outlined is often more complex than I suggest, and news stories are not always as neat as the above model implies. Some news stories will include only two of the aspects: an event which happens and provokes comment and discussion among people is still news, even if it never reaches the mass media.[21] Similarly, the three aspects of news are not bound by chronological order: a news event may be reported and produced immediately by the mass media as soon it has occurred, and the discussion of it as story will occur later. The advantage of this understanding of news, however, is not that it provides an exhaustive description of the news process, but rather opens up what can be regarded as news. Its value lies in the way it helps us understand news as referring to a broader phenomenon than that which appears in the mass media; it enables us to find news sharing in the website blog, the queue in the village post office, the parish magazine as well as the newspaper, radio and television. It affirms that even before the technological transformation of the last fifty years, news as event, story and product has always been around us; for the purposes of this research project, it saves news from simply being understood as a media product and affirms that news can and does exist independent of any future media presentations.

---

[21] Indeed one could argue that some of the news stories that appear in newspapers have neither significant event nor story behind them but are simply the result of journalists trying to fill space.

1.2.4. News and the Christian church

The particular advantage of the above model can be seen when we consider what may be justly regarded as news within the Christian church. As has been already discussed in the introduction to this study, scholars of religious news usually focus on media presentations of news about religion, that is, on news as product, and a particular form of product at that.[22] Religious news refers to those articles or reports which feature in print or on television or radio which make mention of the Christian faith community and its activity on either the local or national basis. The interest here is how journalists and editors select and set out stories about the church, and what values shape those decisions, but the result is that news and the Christian church are only understood to intersect on a fairly limited level.

The model of news explored above warns, however, against seeing news about religion purely in terms of a mass media product; it forces us to consider the presence of news in formats other than mainstream mass media. Indeed, if news is understood as existing at the intersection of event, story and product a much wider range of news can be seen within and concerning the Christian church. News can be described as referring to any *event* (or new revelation) from within the Christian church and faith community which for a section of people, and for a large variety of reasons, represents a *story* that is relevant and/or interesting. This news will usually be expressed as a *product*, either via mainstream media or a non-specialist route such as parish magazine, website or verbal notice.[23] News can thus be found in a parish magazine, church website or blog as well as the news pages of a national

---

[22] Buddenbaum, *Reporting News about Religion*; Judith M. Buddenbaum and Debra L. Mason (eds.), *Readings on Religion as News* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 2000); Hoover, *Religion in the News*; Silk, *Unsecular Media*; Stout and Buddenbaum, *Religion and Mass Media*.

[23] Indeed, it can be argued that with religious news declining in news value in contemporary Britain and the accompanying rise in internet usage, a significant proportion of Christian news is now shared via websites and blogs. An example of an influential website is the Anglican Mainstream site which monitors news from the Anglican Commununion from a traditional and orthodox standpoint; see www.anglican-mainstream.net and for a different view point Thinking Anglicans www.thinkinganglicans.org.uk. For a popular Christian blog see jonnybaker.blogs.com/jonnybaker/.

newspaper;[24] It can include information about a church project in the local community which has had particular impact, as well as a public statement by a senior bishop concerning government provision for the poor; it can take in the appointment of a local vicar as well as the latest developments within the Anglican Communion, the launch of a new Alpha course as well as the latest statistics on Christmas church attendance. News exists on many levels within the Christian church, both for internal consumption and that which interacts with the wider society. It is reasonable to conclude that the presence of news is a given in any Christian community.

1.2.5. Summary

The aim of the above exploration of news has not been to reach definite conclusions in an area of considerable complexity. Rather, I have sought to demonstrate that news should not be restricted in its definition but can properly be understood as a broad phenomenon within contemporary culture. For the purposes of this thesis I have argued that news functions on a number of levels within the Christian church, and not simply within mainstream media. How this affects our understanding of news handling is the question to which we now turn.

1.3. News Handling in Outline

1.3.1. News Handling as a Widespread Phenomenon

Thus far I have argued for a broad understanding of news, based around a model of event, story and product. The focus of this study, however, is not on news itself but rather on what I describe as 'news handling'. It must be recognised that this term is not one commonly found in communication textbooks, and yet I will argue it

---

[24] Judith Buddenbaum does recognise the different audiences for religious news as she describes the 'cosmopolites' who tend to be interested in national religious news, and 'localites', who tend to read stories closer to home. Buddenbaum, *Reporting News about Religion*, 108. Nevertheless, the general trend with research into religious news has been to limit an understanding of news to that which appears in the secular mainstream press. My assertion is that Christian news is much more widespread than that.

describes a widespread phenomenon. I will explain how it fits into the model of news outlined above and then briefly consider examples of news handling within the Christian church.

The task of handling news can be located within the model of news as event, story and product. It refers to the role played by a person who is either involved in the particular event and story, or who acts on behalf of those directly involved, and whose aim is to facilitate the process by which a story becomes a news product, often with the hoped-for result that the news presented to a wider audience reflects the values of the community from which the original story came. Such behaviour can be carried out by specialists and non-specialists alike; the concept of handling news can stretch from referring to the scoutleader writing up a report of the latest camp for the parish magazine, to the public relations professional working for a multinational company and supervising the release of the annual report and accounts. Each person stands on the side of those implicated in the news story itself and handles news on its and their behalf. This individual is thus a steward of the news story, overseeing its journey from event, through story to its final product; this stewardship frequently takes the form of a press release or a written presentation which will be used by others. The journey of handling news will thus often involve a level of negotiation with those in control of the final news product – frequently journalists and editors – but this is not always the case; news handling can be done by those who have considerable control over the final product.[25] Handling news refers to a practice that is as widespread as news itself. Thus while news handling most obviously refers to the task performed by the company press officer releasing news to the media, it can also refer to the blogger reporting on an event he has witnessed, and even the writer of a Christmas round-robin letter. All are engaged in handling news.

---

[25] For example the news handling undertaken by a local councillor producing his own regular newsletter.

1.3.2. Christian News Handling

Christian news handling is news handling undertaken by Christians in their capacity as members of the Christian faith community. Obvious examples include the bishops involved in the Church of England's 'lead bishop' programme, in which a nominated bishop is designated to speak to the media on a certain topic; this person will be required to handle news for and on behalf of the Church of England. Other clear examples of Christians engaged in news handling include those engaged as Diocesan Directors of Communication, to represent the interests of the diocese and the bishop, or those employed within the flourishing communications department at Holy Trinity Brompton which produces news about the Alpha Course which is sent all round the world. Most Christian organisations, and some local churches, have individuals explicitly responsible for handling news.[26]

However, news handling is also done in less professional ways as well, by the vicar writing about a new initiative in the parish magazine or sharing news of a recent confirmation course from the pulpit, by the blogger sharing impressions of a recent conference, by the youth worker writing a report on a recent youth event for the local newspaper, and by the missionary writing that most particular example of Christian correspondence, the prayer newsletter. All are engaged in handling news in some form or another, and while it may not be as obvious as the work of communication professionals employed by Christian organisations, it is in many ways the same practice. Indeed, one of the starting points of this thesis is that there is significant continuity between commonly recognised forms of news handling carried out by professionals within Christian church and that undertaken by Christians not specifically trained for that purpose. 'Christian news handling' thus refers to the practice of communication professionals within the church and

---

[26] The growing use of church communicators has not always been welcomed by religious affairs correspondents who claim that it is now harder to get at real stories than it was before these new appointments. See Ruth Gledhill, "The Endless Trail for a Story that Never Appears" *Church of England Newspaper*, February 2001 and Stephen Bates, "Why God Needs Good PR" *The Guardian*, 19 February 2001.

associated organisations, but it also includes the communicative behaviour of many other members of the faith community as well.

1.4. News Handling in Context

1.4.1. A Complex Task

The above description of news handling on its own, however, fails to give sufficient attention to the complex environment in which contemporary news handling, especially as practised by professionals on behalf of national and international organisations, including the Christian church, takes place. Moreover, it falls short of explaining why the task of news handling, as undertaken by Christians, is an area where theological judgement is of increasing importance. In this section, therefore, I will draw on the work of John B. Thompson and seek to demonstrate why changes in the public sphere render news handling as a task ever more demanding. It will be helpful to examine his findings in a little detail, at the same time keeping in mind that the cultural changes described may well have implications for news handling beyond the political, establishment and business spheres which are the main focus of this study. Indeed, I will further analyse the 'culture of spin' in contemporary communication and conclude by suggesting why this context raises particular questions for the Christian communicator.

1.4.2. Changes in the Public Sphere

Drawing on Thompson's work on media, society and scandal, it is possible to trace three areas of relevance in understanding the context for contemporary news handling.[27] First, Thompson analyses the changes in the media environment, arguing that in its present form it is more 'intensive' and 'extensive' than ever before;[28] that is to say, the mass media industry involves more activity over a wider area than has previously been the case. For the purposes of his study Thompson

---

[27] Thompson, *Media and Modernity* ; John B. Thompson, *Political Scandal: Power and Visibility in the Media Age* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000).

[28] Thompson, *Political Scandal*, 260.

cites this development as a reason why political and public figures are more prone to damaging media investigations; few areas of public life remain out of reach for the rising number of journalists.[29] With respect to handling news this development has opportunities and challenges, both technologically and quantitatively, for professionals concerned with handling news. The possibilities created by the internet include enabling organisations to handle news about themselves through a website without having to go via the mass media, and the increased volume of news coverage means greater opportunity to get a story in the public arena. On the other hand the challenges include greater space for stories detrimental to an organisation, with journalists keen to find a story that will set the agenda for that day. Moreover, the increased speed of the news industry, made possible by technological advances, means that press offices need to be more nimble and flexible in order to deal with a story before it gets blown up out of all proportion. This growth in news activity, and its potential for good and ill so far as an organisation is concerned, have necessitated an increase in the number of media officers, and also in the level of their professionalism. From being press officers these employees have become directors of communication, charged with managing the complex and diverse task of handling news.[30] People employed in this capacity have to be able to spot the opportunities early on to avoid the problems that increased news coverage can cause. News has become big business, and therefore organisations want their news handled as carefully as possible.

Thompson also describes a 'transformation of visibility' within the public sphere, in which that which used to be kept private is now revealed by increased media activity.[31] In a context where the behaviour of the few can now be seen by the many there has been a change in the balance of power; Thompson argues, 'thanks to the

---

[29] Ibid., 261.

[30] Hargreaves, *Journalism: Truth or Dare?* , 180 notes the rise in the number of 'news managers' to the point where they seem to outnumber journalists.

[31] Thompson, *Media and Modernity*, 124-146.

media, it is primarily those who exercise power, rather than those over whom power is exercised, who are subjected to a kind of visibility.'[32] He goes on to outline the reasons why this visibility may become a source of a new and distinctive kind of fragility for those in power and argues that this visibility is something intrinsically difficult to manage.[33] The implications of this increased visibility for those charged with handling news should be obvious. As far as government or business is concerned the greater openness of public life poses a significant threat (as well as an opportunity), and thus news about an organisation acquires greater significance as a contested commodity where the media is increasingly able to gain access to information which the organisation wants to control. The more open an organisation becomes, the more it seeks to handle news about itself more carefully.

The increased visibility of public life has further been accompanied by, or perhaps resulted in, a general decline in trust in establishment organisations, and an increase in the confidence of the mass media to hold these same organisations to account. Public bodies are subject to increased questioning and are susceptible to scandal which can threaten the trust the public has in them, and the nature of the reputation they carry. And yet, as Thompson argues, trust and reputation are vital resources in a public sphere where character counts for more than competence; they are key aspects of the symbolic capital accorded to an individual or institution.[34] News has the potential to create or deplete trust, and yet it is intrinsically contestable, especially in a media culture where journalists are aware of the power they have and are keen to use it. Although some editorial comment has always taken place, now any official government press release is likely to be subjected to heavy editing and journalistic comment. In this complex climate of stories being contested and questioned, and yet being themselves more and more important, it is even more crucial for the communication professional to ensure that the news process is

---

[32] Ibid., 134.

[33] Ibid., 141-146.

[34] Thompson, *Political Scandal*, 245-258.

managed as well as possible. The highly trained public relations officer will use all the means at her disposal to secure a safe passage of the news story from her organisation to the general public; a special relationship with journalists, informal briefings, CD-ROMs with images and video clips are all employed to make the story easier to assemble.[35] For many, handling the news is much more than writing a good press release; it is now about managing the whole process to ensure a story is presented as an organisation would wish.

1.4.3. News Management and a Culture of Spin

Drawing on Thompson's analysis of media and society, it is possible to discern a clear trend: the combination of intensive and extensive media activity (with all the possibilities and challenges that presents), the increasing visibility of, and decreasing trust for, people in the public sphere and establishment organisations, and a media confident to challenge and question, have all led to the classic role of public relations evolving into one of managing news, one characterised by a more proactive, creative and professional approach. Indeed, handling news on behalf of large organisations is now increasingly referred to as a core management activity, indicating the priority that the company should give to this significant work.[36]

A further indication of this change in the context of news handling is the growing use of the term 'spin-doctors' to refer to professionals who handle news. In an earlier work I traced the development of the phenomenon of the spin-doctor from its beginnings in the United States during the 1980s to its arrival in the UK via the New Labour project of the first half of the 1990s.[37] Roy Hattersley argues that it was

---

[35] Hargreaves, *Journalism. Truth or Dare?* , 183.

[36] Roger Haywood, *Manage Your Reputation: How to Plan Public Relations to Build and Protect the Organization's Most Powerful Asset* (London: Kogan Page, 2002); John Smythe, Colette Dorward, and Jerome Reback, *Corporate Reputation: Managing the New Strategic Asset* (London: Century Business, 1992); also Joy Johnson and Lynda Dyson, *News Management: The Anatomy of Spin* (London: Routledge, 2003).

[37] Plyming, "Ethics of Spin", 4-6. See also a helpful historical perspective given in Larry Tye, *The Father of Spin: Edward L. Bernays and the Birth of Public Relations* (New York: Crown, 1998).

probably Peter Mandelson, then Tony Blair's key advisor on presentation, or a member of his team, who consciously introduced the term 'spin' into British vocabulary. He marks the lead-up to the 1997 election as the point that 'talking to the media became an independent operation. Until then it had been an activity which was essentially supplementary to the practice of politics...[Then] it became an occupation in its own right.'[38] The practitioner of spin – the 'spin-doctor' – uses a number of techniques to ensure that the message which reaches the public is exactly what they want them to hear. Commenting on the communicative practice at the White House in Washington, John Anthony Maltese argues that 'spinning a story involves twisting it to one's advantage, using surrogates, press releases, radio actualities, and other friendly sources to deliver the line from an angle that puts the story in the best possible light. Successful spinning involves getting the media to "play along" by convincing them through briefings, backgrounders, or other methods of persuasion – that a particular spin to the story is the correct one.'[39] In this sense spin is understood as referring to certain techniques that a public relations professional may employ to ensure that his or her presentation of a story is the one that finally appears in the media.

In my earlier article, however, I argued that there is a broader meaning to spin than the narrow reference to certain practices of media relations. Spin is now used by non-specialists to describe what is understood to be a certain approach to news handling and communication.[40] The challenge that the New Labour administration was 'all spin and no substance' referred to their approach to communication

---

[38] Roy Hattersley, "We Just Don't Know What to Believe" *The Guardian*, 19 June 2000.

[39] John Anthony Maltese, *Spin Control: the White House Office of Communications and the Management of Presidential News*, 2nd, rev. ed. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994), 215.

[40] Plyming, "Ethics of Spin", 6-8. When historian Peter Jones refers to Caesar Augustus as a 'Master of Spin' he is referring to his general attitude to handling news about himself, not the specific practices employed by Peter Mandelson inter al. Peter Jones, "Augustus: Master of Spin," in *Running the Empire* (BBC Radio 3, 8 October 1999).

generally rather than any specific media techniques.[41] Hans Blix, head of the United Nations Monitoring, Verification and Inspection Commission (UNMOVIC), pointing to the way governments were managing news and data before the second Gulf War, described them as being part of a 'culture of spin'.[42] This reference to a 'culture of spin' hints that spin is not simply a word that is restricted to the political sphere, a term simply used by media professionals. Indeed, the focus groups which I conducted for the second half of the thesis demonstrated that the term has passed into popular vocabulary and is used to describe a certain form of contemporary communication.[43] What exactly is being referred to here is not particularly easy to define but it is possible to suggest certain characteristics. After a study of the contemporary usage of the term spin I argued that it was possible to trace certain marks of a culture of spin: the priority given to the audience and finding out what they want to hear; the particular desire to create and protect reputation; the emphasis on presentation over content, on how a message looks and not just what it says; the partial nature of truth, where an objective approach is never sought.[44] Thus when consumers of news talk about spin they are making a comment on the values which drive a particular piece of news handling rather than simply the techniques which are associated with its dissemination. The growing use of the term spin by observers and consumers of the mediated world indicates that they have found a way to describe the prevailing values in contemporary communication. A culture of spin – which I have suggested might be understood as exhibiting the four characteristics described above – is clearly an important feature of the more general communicative background.[45]

---

[41] It was a charge made by William Hague to the Prime Minister, Tony Blair, throughout summer 2000; for an example see the exchanges of 13 July. Reference Hansard.

[42] In an interview of the *Today* programme, (BBC Radio 4, 18 September 2003).

[43] In each of the four focus groups, involving both clergy and lay people, the word spin was used at least once to describe an example of news handling which the participants had come across.

[44] Plyming, "Ethics of Spin", 8-12.

[45] It needs to be recognised that the term 'spin' has yet to gain common currency in academic discourse; it has remained at the popular and journalistic level. It may well be true that the

1.4.4. Summary

The conclusion of this survey is thus that while news handling is itself a relatively straightforward practice, carried out widely by individuals with some responsibility for ensuring that a news story reaches a wider audience in a form that reflects the wishes of the party involved in the story itself, it is often carried out in a context that is increasingly complex. For professionals working for large organisations it is commonly referred to as news management, with the employees themselves sometimes being described as spin-doctors (although this term has negative connotations).[46] As a result it is tempting to believe that the practice of such people has nothing in common with the work of a non-specialist handling news on a local basis. To an extent this is true, but just as news is not just that which appears in mass media but other forms as well, so handling news is not just the preserve of communication professionals working for large organisations and engaged in news management. Furthermore, I want to argue that the cultural changes which have accompanied the growing professionalism of news management have had an impact beyond the specialist sphere; it is not unreasonable to suggest that most people handling news in the UK today are aware of the culture of spin which describes, if not their own particular context, then certainly much of the more professional news management that they witness. The context for news handling is more complex than it has ever been.

1.5. Christian News Handling in a Challenging Context

It should be obvious from the above survey that the many contexts for Christians handling news may be every bit as complex as they are for other communicators. Certainly the perspective for national Christian institutions is just as challenging as for other public bodies: the various parts of the Christian faith community operate

---

term has a limited shelf-life but its use by consumers of news suggests that they are aware of certain dynamics in news handling which would not have been the case twenty years ago.

[46] See widespread use of these terms in Goddard, "Power of the Media," 70.

amidst the same intensive and extensive media activity, are subject to the same pressure for visibility as the government, are characterised by the same decreasing trust as other public bodies, and are exposed to the same critical journalistic enquiry seen elsewhere in society.[47] It is not difficult to see the reason for the increase in professionals employed by churches and Christian organisations to deal with this changing environment, nor for the perception by some religious affairs journalists that the church is trying to manage news in just as careful a way as other national bodies.[48]

The wider cultural changes concerning news handling are also of significance for Christian communicators. The church does not operate isolated from the world, and neither does it have a record of remaining unaffected by prevailing trends in contemporary culture. The background influence of spin is as significant for the church as it is for any other organisation handling news; even if it regards itself as distinct from the sullying influences of political life, the features of the cultural landscape are still there. Christians sometimes find themselves speaking into a context where the characteristics of spin are usually seen. Indeed, my own experience within the church suggests that on occasions Christians handling news display some of the characteristics of a culture of spin themselves: when a minister who was preparing to interview me for a Sunday service told me not only the questions he was going to ask but also the answers he knew the congregation wanted to hear; when many Christians, especially from the evangelical tradition, seem to handle news about themselves in such a way as to create and protect a reputation for themselves as successful ministers of the gospel;[49] when a Christian

---

[47] For more on the decline of trust in the church see Jim McDonnell, "Desperately Seeking Credibility: English Catholics, the News Media and the Church," in *Mediating Religion: Conversations in Media, Religion and Culture*, ed. Jolyon P. Mitchell and Sophia Marriage (London: T&T Clark, 2003) and also Hoover, "Mass Media and Religious Pluralism," 190.

[48] See the negative comments in Bates, "Why God Needs Good PR" and Gledhill, "Endless Trail" .

[49] "When Superman Slips," *idea - The Magazine for Members of the Evangelical Alliance UK*, January-March 2001.

media organisation I was visiting was more concerned with putting over a good image of itself than sorting out the important issues with its employees; when prayer newsletters include only the good news and leave out the negative aspects of the whole truth of which I and others are aware.

None of the above experiences is proof that Christian news handling is seriously affected by a culture of spin, but it provides the impetus to ask whether such communication which is widely undertaken by Christians should be somehow distinctive in a culture where news is more managed than ever before. Certainly the questions raised by the four marks of spin (see section 1.4.3.) appear at first sight to be of theological importance. The question of starting with what the audience wants to hear seems in stark contrast to a Christian commitment to revealed truth; what role should the audience have in determining the content of news to be shared? The emphasis placed on creating and protecting reputation, with its attendant reluctance to acknowledge failure, throws up interesting questions for a community which recognises its place in a fallen world. To what extent should reputation concern the Christian handling news? The focus on presentation over content, on image over word, intersects with existing theological debates about the primacy of the word in Christian communication.[50] What is the appropriate balance between image and content? Finally, what sort of commitment to truth-telling is required in a culture where truth has been so significantly devalued?[51] There are no simple answers to these questions, and none will be attempted here. It is important to note, however, that if the church is in any way affected by the complex context of contemporary news handling (and Christians are generally more influenced by

---

[50] See Jacques Ellul, *The Humiliation of the Word*, trans. Joyce Main Hanks (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1985) and a recent discussion in Goddard, "Power of the Media," .

[51] For a recent examination of the state of truth-telling in contemporary culture see Bernard Williams, *Truth and Truthfulness: An Essay in Genealogy* (Princeton, NJ.: Princeton University Press, 2002). Williams argues for a commitment to 'common-sense' truth-telling, but recognises the pressure truth-telling is under in a postmodern culture.

prevailing cultures than they usually admit), then significant questions are raised about the widespread practice of Christian news handling.

It remains puzzling, therefore, that relatively little work has been done on the theological issues raised by news handling. While there is considerable practical training on offer for Christians engaged in handling news, on both a professional and a lay basis – itself an indication that news handling is a growth area within Christian ministry – there is little extensive theological reflection about the issues raised by handling news. The Churches' Media Council (formerly the Churches' Advisory Council for Local Broadcasting), a body concerned with advancing the Christian faith through the media does, in addition to offering training, also run annual conferences for communication practitioners within the Christian church and outside it at which some broader questions are addressed. For example, in 2004 the conference engaged with a number of questions concerning truth-telling in contemporary news; however, the debate centred more around the possibility or otherwise of objectivity in news rather than the wider theological issues suggested above.

The mid 1990s saw the publication of several practical handbooks for Christian communicators.[52] These texts, however, concern themselves almost exclusively with the technical aspects of handling news such as writing a good press release, planning an effective publicity campaign and forming productive relationships with the local media; the questions of wider theological significance remain largely unexplored.[53] While the presence of such texts illustrates the existence of news handling within the Christian faith community, it also serves to demonstrate the

---

[52] Richard Thomas, *An Introduction to Church Communication* (Oxford: Lynx, 1994); Jackie Sheppard, *Dealing with the Media* (Didcot: Baptist Union of Great Britain, 1995); and Mike Stickland, *A Manual for Positive Press Relations: Getting Church News into Local Papers* ([Grantham]: Autumn House, [1996]).

[53] Richard Thomas hints at the broader theological context, particularly the appropriateness of openness and vulnerability in Christian communication, but there is no systematic theological engagement. See Thomas, *Introduction to Church Communication*, 8-9, 40-41, 95.

need for some deeper theological input into an activity which is not only widespread within the Christian church at every level, but also one that is increasingly demanding in contemporary culture. To put the question bluntly, what theological insights will help Christians handle news faithfully in a culture of spin?

1.6. Conclusions

It has not been the aim of this chapter to prove that Christians engaged in handling news are necessarily complicit in a culture of spin, but I have sought to suggest that, given the challenging communicative context, a theological assessment of the practice as undertaken by Christian communicators is overdue. In reaching this conclusion I have argued, first, that news exists on more levels than commonly acknowledged. I outlined a model of news which understands it as a form of communication focussed around event, story and product; for the purposes of this thesis I concluded that news about the Christian church could be located in a range of places and not simply within the mainstream media usually associated with 'religious news'. I argued, second, that news handling describes a long-standing and widespread practice, whereby an individual or group implicated in the story, or acting on behalf of those involved, oversees the release of information either to a media outlet or direct to a wider audience. Christian news handling thus refers to the practice both of Christian media professionals, such as press officers and directors of communication, and also to non-specialists sharing news in a number of different contexts, often not via the mainstream media.

Finally, I sought to demonstrate that, on a national level at least, news handling is taking place in a public sphere where news is an increasingly contested commodity, with the result that increased energy and focus is given to a practice now commonly known as news management. I suggested that an example of this changing communicative environment is the language of spin which has entered the public vocabulary and which refers to an approach to handling news which is primarily concerned with audience reception, the creation and protection of reputation,

presentation over content and a commitment only to the partial nature of truth. I concluded by outlining why this culture of spin posed particular questions for the Christian communicator seeking to handle news in a faithful way, and yet I also showed that extensive theological reflection in this area has yet to be undertaken. If the context for news handling is as has been described, then the Christian engaged in such an activity faces a profound challenge. It is with that challenge in mind that this study now turns to the apostle Paul, in the hope that his communicative theory and practice might suggest a framework against which the behaviour of contemporary Christian communicators can be measured.

PART A THE APOSTLE PAUL'S NEWS TO CORINTH

2. INTRODUCTION AND APPROACH: NEWS IN PAUL

2.1. Introduction

The focus in Part A of this thesis is on the hardship narratives in the apostle Paul's Corinthian correspondence and in particular on analysing the theological framework that these passages pose for the contemporary communicator. Such a focus begs two important questions, notably why the apostle Paul should be adopted at all as someone with a contribution to make to a critique of present-day news handling, and, if he is, why the stories of personal suffering from 1 and 2 Corinthians justify particular attention. The aim of this chapter is to address those two questions in turn. First, I will argue that the apostle Paul has for a number of reasons, including the rhetorical context in which he found himself and the prevalence of news within the first-century Christian world, the potential to make a distinct contribution to our area of study. In support of this point I will explore in some detail the extent to which it is possible to speak of news as a communicative phenomenon in both the first century and today. I will develop this point by arguing, second, that the Pauline corpus includes a number of different news stories which the apostle could be said to have handled in his writing. I will further argue that, while it would be interesting to examine all of these texts in detail, the category of story which suggests itself most clearly as deserving further focus are those passages in the Corinthian correspondence where Paul records his own personal hardship. This chapter will conclude, therefore, with a summary of the case for focusing on these Corinthian texts for the rest of this study.

2.2. The Apostle Paul as a Resource for Theological Reflection on Contemporary Communication

2.2.1. Introduction

For the purposes of this research Paul's place within the scriptural canon marks him out immediately as a potential resource for our wider theological exploration. The theological assumption behind this needs to be made clear at the outset, namely that biblical witness carries a unique authority for the Christian theologian, and that therefore any reflection on a theology of communication will benefit from a rich engagement with the canon of scripture. Recent research into models of Christian communication is generally distinguished by an absence of such biblical reflection, and yet it is my belief that Christian communicators should be able to relate their communicative theory and practice to the foundational Christian texts.[1] It must be acknowledged, however, that even for those communication scholars who do seek a level of biblical engagement the apostle Paul is not the figure normally turned to for insight into communicative theory and practice. Many researchers look to the communicative behaviour of Jesus, and especially to his parables, as possessing a normative quality for contemporary communicators.[2] It seems to these writers self-

---

[1] Many scholars adopt a teleological approach to Christian communication, arguing for what it should look like without extensive reflection on the theological foundations for such a practice. This seems especially true of the work of the World Association of Christian Communication; see WACC, *Statements on Communication by the World Association of Christian Communication* (London: WACC, 1990) and Philip Lee, *The World Association for Christian Communication 1975-2000: A Labour of Love* (London: WACC, 2000). Other scholars concentrate on how secular models of communication can inform the communicative practice of Christians, but there is no attempt at a biblical critique of such an analysis; see John Bluck, *Christian Communication Reconsidered* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1989) and David G. Attfield, *Proclaiming the Gospel in a Secular Age: a General Theory of Religious Communication* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001). Contributors to the more general field of communication ethics often assume a Christian world view in their writing, but are apparently reticent about making any explicit connection to foundational Christian texts; see Christians and Traber, eds., *Communication Ethics*.

[2] For example Edmund Arens, *Christopraxis: A Theology of Action*, trans. John F. Hoffmeyer (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995). Charles H. Kraft suggest that Jesus is the 'best communicational bridge God ever produced' and produces a model of communication based on his practice; see Charles H. Kraft, *Communicating Jesus' Way* (Pasadena, Calif.:

evident that Christians would want to communicate in the same way as the one to whom their allegiance is owed, and thus the example of Jesus is held up as a model for Christian communicators to follow. Other scholars choose a more systematic approach to scripture which encompasses a range of biblical writers, and broader scriptural themes, such as the fall and prophecy.[3] Given this preference for focusing either on the communication of Jesus or wider biblical themes, some words are necessary to explain the recourse to the apostle Paul.

2.2.2. Paul and His Context

Clearly Paul occupies a different position to Jesus in the history of the church, but it is possible to make a case that his example is more foundational for the contemporary Christian communicator than that of Jesus. The unique characteristics of Jesus' calling, the particular role he had in ushering in God's kingdom, the unrepeatable nature of his divine/human identity and the miraculous gifts he employed should all serve to make us stop and think before advocating a simple replication of the way he spoke to people. Any recourse to the example of Jesus' communicative behaviour as paradigmatic for the modern communicator is in danger of neglecting that which sets Jesus apart from us as well as what unites us with him. While this is also true of Paul (he was an apostle who had a remarkable and one-off ministry throughout the Mediterranean), it is significantly less the case; it can be argued that Paul has more in common with the communicators in this study than has Jesus. Jesus was, in essence, communicating a message about himself and his place in the coming kingdom of God; Paul was sharing a gospel based on someone else, namely Jesus Christ, and it is this Christ-centred perspective that highlights the potential continuity with Christian communicators today.

William Carey Library, 1999). In a survey of religious broadcasting Dominic Emmanuel alludes to the influence of Jesus but goes little further in this direction, preferring reflection on the work of Buber and Bakhtin. Dominic Emmanuel, *Challenges of Christian Communication: Monologue or Dialogue?* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999).

[3] Quentin J. Schultze, *Communicating for Life: Christian Stewardship in Community and Media* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2000); Pierre Babin and Mercedes Iannone, *The New Era in Religious Communication*, trans. David Smith (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991).

Moreover, in his letters we have the earliest extant documents of Christian communication; the uncontested letters of Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians, 1 Thessalonians and Philemon are evidence of communication which was taking place within 30 years after the death of Jesus.[4] Thus not only does Paul stand at the beginning of the history of Christian communication, but even on a superficial level there is a degree of continuity between his practice and that of Christian communicators today.[5]

There are, however, further features of Paul's communicative context which make him a highly suggestive figure for our present research. It must, of course, be allowed that mass media, in the way we understand them today in terms of broadcast or printed technology, were not present at the time of Paul.[6] Nevertheless, there are two distinctive aspects of the communicative environment in which Paul was working that show a further level of correlation between his world and ours.

First, Paul was speaking and writing in a complex and contested communicative environment, not unlike our own (as described in chapter one). That the classical world was heavily influenced by formal and popular forms of rhetoric is well known; in a largely oral culture oratorical skills were the keys to advancement.[7] In its purest form rhetoric was in essence the art of persuasion, but by the first century new strands had grown up which regarded speaking as an art in itself, whereby

---

[4] Bullmore, *Paul's Theology of Rhetorical Style*, 4.

[5] Michael A. Bullmore argues for the value of Paul's communicative example, and cites also his ability to reflect critically on his own practice as enhancing his significance as a theological conversation partner. Ibid., 3-4.

[6] It may be argued, however, that in their portrayal of image and power, coins and monuments in the ancient world had some of the functions of a mass media today. See Richard E Oster, "Numismatic Windows in the Social World of Early Christianity: a Methodological Enquiry," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 101 (1982) and Susan Silberberg-Pierce, "The Many Faces of the Pax Augusta: Images of War and Peace in Rome and Gallia Narbonensis," *Art History* 9 (1986).

[7] Ben Witherington, *The Paul Quest: the Renewed Search for the Jew of Tarsus* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 89.

what one said was sometimes less important than how one said it.[8] In a quotation which shows some correlation with the presence of the media and news industry in contemporary Britain, Duane Litfin describes the dominance of rhetoric in everyday classical life.

> Rhetoric played a powerful and pervasive role in first-century Greco-Roman society. It was a commodity of which the vast majority of the population were either producers, or much more likely consumers, and not seldom avid consumers...Oratory became more prevalent than ever. In both the Roman and Greek setting the frequency with which speakers rose to address audiences, for whatever reasons, seemed to be on the rise during the first century.[9]

Public speaking would have been something on which each consumer would have had a view; rhetors could expect to be graded according to certain given criteria. Paul was thus operating in a context where his communicative behaviour would have come under scrutiny on a range of levels; he was speaking to a public that would have been able to critique his manner of communication as well as the content. As a highly literate and intelligent communicator Paul would have been aware both of the complex and contested rhetorical environment in which he was speaking, and also the range of communicative choices open to him.[10] More can, and will, be said about the similarity of the ancient context to our present postmodern situation, but from this brief survey of the rhetorical environment it is clear that within the scriptural canon Paul has a distinct contribution to make to our present research question because of the setting in which he found himself, a setting which was in some ways as complex as the one facing today's communicators.

Second, Paul was operating in an environment where there was widespread sharing of news. This is immediately obvious from even a cursory reading of the New

---

[8] Ibid., 115-116.

[9] Litfin, *Paul's Theology of Proclamation*, 132.

[10] Witherington, *Paul Quest*, 126; also Jr. M. Luther Stirewalt, *Paul, the Letter Writer* (Grand Rapids, Mi.: Eerdmans, 2003), 25.

Testament. The pages of Paul's letters are sprinkled with references to information which either Paul has received or which he expects his correspondents to have heard about: Timothy brings good news from the community in Thessalonica (1 Thess 3:6); Paul sends him to Philippi with the aim of achieving the same result (Phil 2:19); the Philippian offering referred to in Philippians 4:15-16 seems to have been the result of news about Paul reaching that early Christian community; Onesiphorous had clearly heard the news from somewhere that Paul was in prison (2 Tim 1:16-17); the Thessalonians had become an example 'to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia' (1 Thess 1:7). News seems to have flown freely between the early churches.[11]

An examination of infrastructure of the Roman world indicates why news sharing took place so readily. It is clear that there were highly developed communication networks throughout the Roman Empire. The grid of Roman roads and clear shipping lanes afforded safer and easier travel than ever before.[12] Although the official postal system could not be used by private citizens, the letter carriers employed by private individuals could use the official staging posts or rest stops if their travel was for more than a day. They travelled at quite a pace: a letter could get from Corinth to Jerusalem in a little over three weeks. There is an example from the third century of a letter travelling 150 miles in four days.[13] Papyrus evidence suggests that letters flowed with frequency and ease throughout the Hellenistic and

---

[11] See Stirewalt, *Paul, the Letter Writer*, 12-13 for an examination of the traffic of people and information between Ephesus and Corinth.

[12] Michael B. Thompson, "The Holy Internet: Communication Between Churches in the First Christian Generation," in *The Gospel for All Christians*, ed. Richard Bauckham (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998), 50-51.

[13] Eldon Jay Epp, "New Testament Papyrus Manuscripts and Letter Carrying in Greco-Roman Times," in *The Future of Early Christianity: essays in honor of Helmut Koester*, ed. Birger A. Pearson (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 52.

Roman worlds.[14] Against this background it is easy to understand why private letter-writing was a regular and routine activity.[15]

Yet it also seems the case that these communication networks were exploited more by the early Christian communities than perhaps by any other.[16] There are probably a number of reasons for this: first, it seems that the larger early Christian communities, particularly Jerusalem, functioned as 'hubs' through which information could flow and be collected.[17] Second, Christian communities were places where the written word had considerable value and importance; in a study on the place of books in the early Christian church Harry Gamble notes that texts were not 'entertainments or luxuries but the essential instruments of Christian life'.[18] In this written form it is easy to see why news could travel quickly, especially when it was combined with oral messages (the messenger could carry the letter and add his own message). Finally, and most importantly, Christian communities wanted to stay in touch with each other. They were often far-flung, isolated communities that were experiencing opposition to their new-found faith and were in need of support. As such they retained a strong sense of their collective identity and thus hungered for news about each other. This news enabled them to share in each others' needs (Phil 2:25 'Still I think it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus... your messenger and minister to my need'; 4:16 'For even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me help for my needs more than once') and learn from each other (Phil 4:8-9 'Keep on

---

[14] Ibid., 45-51.

[15] Although Stirewalt, *Paul, the Letter Writer*, 3-6 adds the necessary caution that oral communication was almost always preferred over epistolary contact.

[16] See Harry Y. Gamble, *Books and Readers in the Early Church: A History of Early Christian Texts* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 1995), 140. 'Early Christian literature was disseminated more quickly and over a far wider area than were non-Christian writings and found a readership more numerous than the most ambitious pagan authors could have hoped for their works.'

[17] Thompson, "Holy Internet," 53-54; Gamble, *Books and Readers*, 142.

[18] Gamble, *Books and Readers*, 140.

doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me').[19] Indeed, Stirewalt argues that in the turbulent world of early Christianity a carefully-written letter from Paul would have provided a much-needed example of orderliness.[20] All of this is evidence that Paul was operating in a context where news was a precious commodity which could travel relatively easily and quickly over long distances. Paul's world thus has some similarities to the news culture we discussed in chapter one; the Christian diaspora was a network of communities where news was a valuable commodity, communities which relied on stories for nourishment of their common life.

2.2.3. News in the First and Twenty-First Centuries

Thus far I have argued that the available evidence points towards news as a broad communicative phenomenon being a crucial component in the life of the early Christian communities; the first churches were able to send and receive news and apparently took considerable effort to do so. It is also important, however, to be clear about the differences between news as a modern phenomenon, as described in chapter one, and the news circulating within the early church. Drawing an analogy between news in the first and twenty-first centuries requires more than simply noting that news clearly existed on some level within the nascent Christian church. Clearly one way to address this question would be to examine how the model of news as event, story and product applies to a reading of early Christian texts. That is to say, is it possible, using a broad definition of news, to identify clear examples of news within extant correspondence from the first century? In due course I will address precisely this question and argue that such a model reveals how the apostle Paul, among other things, handled a range of news stories within his letters. There are, however, wider areas to address before this question is tackled, namely how the

---

[19] Thompson, "Holy Internet," 58-60 lists a number of reasons for which the early Christian communities kept in touch.

[20] Stirewalt, *Paul, the Letter Writer*, 116.

broader context for news differs between the world of the apostle Paul on the one hand and that of contemporary communicators on the other.[21]

It is valuable to bear in mind four points of dissimilarity as we draw an analogy between news in the apostle Paul's day and that in contemporary culture.[22]

First, there is a substantial difference in technology. In chapter one we identified how technological developments have often been a lever for growth in the dissemination of news.[23] Today news exists on television and radio, in mass-circulation newspapers, and on the internet available instantly worldwide. The contrast with the world of the apostle Paul, where letters and oral communication were the chief communication channels open to the lay person, could not be greater. In terms of technology available for those wishing to handle news, the gap is a significant one.

Second, there is now a greater professionalisation of those charged with handling news. The professional news journalist, seeking out and reporting stories, was a phenomenon unknown to the apostle Paul; likewise the news manager whose sole task is to handle news on behalf of a group or body. These two professions are themselves part of a large and complex worldwide news industry that could not have been imagined at the time of the early church.[24] In Paul's day news was reported, but it was handled by those who had the stories to share. With the possible exception of those communicating on behalf of the Roman authorities,

---

[21] In addressing this question I am building on my analysis of contemporary news as set out in chapter one.

[22] In drawing an analogy I am seeking simply to show a partial similarity between the communicative phenomenon of news in the different eras; this case is strengthened by considering the parameters to this similarity by outlining the points of dissimilarity.

[23] See also Carla B. Johnston, *Global News Access: the Impact of New Communication Technologies* (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 1998), 59ff.

[24] For a discussion of the impact of changes among news professionals see Hargreaves, *Journalism: Truth or Dare?* , 177-195 and Paul Manning, *Spinning for Labour: Trade Unions and the New Media Environment* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1998), 368-370.

news sharing was a lay activity, undertaken by those with a story to tell, rather than with any specific training or professional expertise. It was a cottage industry, compared to the multinational concern that it is today.

Third, there is a cultural difference in the role that news played in the two historical contexts. Here we may return to the analysis of John B. Thompson explored in chapter one where he described the 'intensive' and 'extensive' characteristics of news in contemporary culture.[25] The reality is that, while news was undoubtedly circulating in the Roman empire of the first century, and certainly mattered for the early Christian communities, it does not approach the sheer volume, range and speed of news in the world of today.[26] Sharing news in the first century had little of the frenetic pace of today's news where stories evolve on an hourly basis and can have impact on the other side of the world.[27]

Finally, news now has the potential for a much larger and more diverse audience than was the case at the time of the apostle Paul. This is perhaps the most significant difference between the two historical and cultural contexts. Thompson describes a 'transformation of visibility' in which barriers between public and private life have been broken down through the more intensive and extensive media and news activity. Drawing a distinction between news as a public and a private phenomenon is perhaps a slightly crude and artificial approach, but it is true to say that the audience for news today is much larger and more diverse than ever before. Among the early Christian churches news was shared via personal relational

---

[25] See section 1.4.2. above.

[26] That it did circulate is, however, clear. See a discussion in Mitchell, *History of News*, 53-58 as outlined in section 1.2.1. above.

[27] For an evolving news story that had worldwide consequences the controversy over the cartoons concerning the prophet Mohammed that appeared in the Danish newspaper *Jyllands-Posten* in September 2005 is a fine example; see Tarik Ahmed Elseewi, "The Danish Cartoon Controversy: Globalized Spaces and Universalizing Impulses," *Global Media Journal* 6, no. 11 (2007); see also analysis by Thomas Buch-Anderson, *Denmark Row: The Power of Cartoons*(BBC News Website 3 October 2006 accessed 1 February 2008); available from news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/5392786.stm.

networks; people had some sort of relationship with the people whose news they were hearing. One of the ways news stories are reported today is via mass media with a potential audience of millions, virtually none of whom will have a meaningful relationship with the person sharing the news. This complexity of audience reception makes the news handling process much more demanding for the contemporary communicator.

A further implication of this diversity of audience is that it is now much more challenging to share news with just one audience without other publics being aware of the stories being reported. The advent of the internet as a vehicle for news sharing means that stories which were meant for one audience can easily be made available for others. To use examples from Christian communication: a vicar might share news from the pulpit on a Sunday morning, only to find others coming to hear the news having listened to the sermon on the internet.[28] A diocesan bishop may want to communicate a message via the diocesan newspaper, only to find that the story has been picked up and reported with a particular slant within the national broadsheet press.[29] A letter *ad clerum* from the Archbishop of Canterbury is as much a universal document as it is a private correspondence with Church of England clergy; it could be on a website or blog before it reached many vicars' desks. The question of an audience for news is thus much more complex today than it was in the world of the apostle Paul.

---

[28] When in summer 2006 a vicar of a large London church asked for the recording to be paused during a sensitive part of his sermon, so that it would not appear on the internet, his actions were widely criticised both within and outside the church. However, he was simply recognising the communicative reality described above. (Personal correspondence, January 2008).

[29] See the debate caused by Graham Dow, the Bishop of Carlisle's, comments on families eating together, made in his diocesan newspaper in October 2003. It was picked up in the national press, and discussed with a range of reactions on national radio. See Graham Dow, *The Importance of Family Meals*(October 2003 accessed 8 February 2008); available from www.carlislediocese.org.uk/news/31/346.html.

It is possible, however, to frame these differences too starkly, in a way that might suggest that the gap between the two historical contexts is so substantial as to make any analogy of news unfeasible. The reality is somewhat more complex. News as a contemporary communicative phenomenon is actually more diverse that the above description of dissimilarities might at first sight indicate. As some of these subtleties are explored, subtleties that have become increasingly important in the last ten years of internet development, it will become clear that there might be more in common between news and news handling in the first and twenty-first centuries than we might at first imagine.

First, it is important to be clear that news today is not just about news in mass media. This is a point which I made when I argued for a broad model of news as event, story and product, but it bears repeating here, for it has implications for identifying similarities with the first century context. It is simply not the case that all news handled today goes through established news organisations such as television, radio or newspapers. Organisations handle news about themselves via press offices and internal publications; on a local level communicators share stories with the audience direct. In the second half of this thesis I will examine two examples of news which were not to be found within traditional news outlets: the Church of England sharing news about its own attendance statistics on its website and Holy Trinity Brompton publishing stories about Alpha through its own publication *Alpha News*. News exists on a number of different levels and in a number of different places; there is thus the potential for a greater degree of correlation with the world of the New Testament which was technologically much less developed than today.

Second, and developing the point above, it is inaccurate to imagine news handling as something done exclusively by communication professionals. The presence of journalists and news managers should not be allowed to obscure the fact that news is also being handled by people without a specialist background. The increasing use

of websites as a way of sharing news, and the parallel development of the blog as a vehicle for an individual to report events and views, means that news is being handled by lay people as well as communication professionals.[30] Coupled with this there is the ongoing practice of news handled on a local level where one person handles news on behalf of a small organisation or a club. That the apostle Paul was not a news professional does not necessarily, therefore, make him so different to some of those handling news today.

Third, while much news has the potential to reach an unlimited general audience, it does not follow that all news is handled in this way. News that we might describe as 'in-house news', that is news delivered within an organisation or network, still takes place in both the secular and Christian sphere. Companies produce newsletters for their employees; dioceses produce newspapers for the members in the different churches. That certain stories may be taken up and (mis)used by others does not negate the fact that they were initially handled with a particular audience in mind; it merely illustrates that that primary audience might not be the only audience. If early Christian news sharing was 'in-house' it was not so very different from some news handling today.

Fourth, it is also the case that communication within the early church included a greater diversity of audience than might initially be imagined. While it is true that the apostle Paul knew the churches to which he was addressing his letters, he was not writing to monochrome or even single groups of people. The church in Corinth was a diverse group of believers, encompassing both rich and poor residents of that city; sharing news with them unlikely to have been an easy task. Furthermore, Galatians is addressed to 'the churches in Galatia' (Galatians 1:2); Paul's words would have been read out to a number of different audiences. Romans 16:1-16 indicates that there were a number of different house-churches in that city (and the

---

[30] See for example the blog by Cambridge chaplain and theologian Maggi Dawn at http://maggidawn.typepad.com/.

evidence is anyway that Paul did not have intimate knowledge of the Roman church). All of this is not suggest that Paul's letters would have reached a general audience outside the Christian church, but the groups that received his news were perhaps more diverse than might be imagined.

2.2.4. Conclusions

The aim of the above discussion has been first, to suggest some *prima facie* reasons for looking at the apostle Paul, principally the contested rhetorical environment in which he was operating and the importance of sharing news in the early church. Second, I have also sought to explore some of the areas of correlation and dissonance between news in the first and twenty-first centuries, in order to prepare better the ground for our discussion of news and news handling in the writings of the apostle Paul. For the purposes of this research project, this latter discussion has been important, and it is worthwhile summarising the case I have made. If contemporary news is seen as embodied only in the half-hour of news stories packaged for the *Ten O'clock News*, or those articles in the newspapers that come through the letterbox in the morning, then the gap between news now and news in the first century will appear huge. If, however, contemporary news is understood as a broad communicative event which can be found in a number of different places, including, but not exclusively within, established mass media, then the potential for an analogy between news in today's world and the world of the apostle Paul is greatly increased. If news and news handling is located in the company newsletter, the curate's blog, the church magazine, the charity's press release, then greater similarities may be found with a first century context where news was widely shared within the early Christian church. To argue this is not to ignore the differences in culture and context; indeed, being sensitive to these differences will hopefully lead to a more nuanced interpretation and application of the Pauline texts. However, it is to suggest that in turning to the apostle Paul as someone communicating in a climate of news sharing we are not examining a practice totally alien to that discharged by today's Christian communicators. Indeed, in today's

increasingly complex news climate, in which news and news handling are no longer the preserve of established mass media or communication professionals, the potential is there for a rich and constructive dialogue between the world of the first century and the world of today.

2.3. Categorising News in Paul

2.3.1. Introduction

My recourse to the apostle Paul to provide our theological framework has rested so far on these two understandings: first, that as a writer within the scriptural canon he is part of a uniquely authoritative source for Christian theology; and second, that within the canon, and because of the communicative context in which he found himself – both in terms of rhetoric and the general sharing of news (notwithstanding the technological and cultural differences) – he is a figure with a potentially significant contribution to make to a theology of contemporary communication, especially with regard to news handling. However, there remains a need to enquire further into Paul's communicative practice, and in particular to ascertain the extent to which, surrounded as he was by a general environment of news sharing, the apostle found himself handling news on a regular basis. Alongside this enquiry there is also the need to decide which Pauline texts will form the basis of detailed textual analysis from which a theological framework might be drawn. The task before us is, therefore, twofold: first, to discover in which texts Paul handles news himself, and second, to determine which of these texts merit further study for the overall aim of this thesis.

This next section is concerned with the first aim, for it is a critical question with which to engage. Thus far in this thesis I have argued for a theoretical model of news which is less concerned with sociological developments or technological innovation, but sees news rather as a way of describing an organic process by which information is revealed to, and received by, a wider audience. It is at this theoretical level that I am suggesting there is greatest continuity between the communicative

practice of the first and twenty-first centuries. Recognising that the wider audience for news was, in the days before the development of mass media, likely to be much more limited in scope, I have nevertheless suggested that the apostle Paul found himself in a context where there was widespread sharing of news.

However, while I may have outlined some similarity in context, I have yet to demonstrate that the apostle Paul himself engaged in sharing news. The aim of this section, therefore, is to ascertain whether it is possible to locate what we may define as 'news' within the apostle's letters. In so doing we will not neglect the differences in context between Paul's world and ours but will focus chiefly on our model of news as 'event', 'story' and 'product'. It is this model which opens up the possibility that, while the practice of, and context for, news may have changed, the base communicative reality – that of sharing information with a wider audience – has not. The task before us is thus to look for events reported in the apostle's letters, that is, happenings to Paul and others that are referred to at points in his epistolary correspondence. It also needs to be examined how these events become stories for Paul; why does he report these events in particular? Finally, some comment will be made on the way the stories are presented in epistolary form.

An obvious approach is to go through each of the uncontested letters in turn and see where news may be found, but this would seem to be a laborious way of proceeding.[31] Instead I will seek to identify categories of news which stretch across

---

[31] A further approach would be to draw on Paul's use of a disclosure formula as a way of introducing particularly significant information (Rom 1:13, 11:25; 1 Cor 10:1; 12:1; 2 Cor 1:8; 1 Thess 4:13). It would be convenient if this were an indicator that Paul was handling some specific news, but this seems not to be the case. While on occasions Paul does use this type of phrase to introduce a piece of identifiable news (2 Cor 8:1), his general use of the formula is wider than that. It is as much an indicator of emphasis for Paul as a sign that he is consciously passing on news about himself or someone else (Rom 11:25; 1 Thess 4:13). Thus the formula is largely about how Paul's readers may find a particular point hard to accept, or need to hear it with special emphasis. Also, as we will see, many obvious pieces of news in Paul are not introduced with a disclosure formula. For more see John Lee White, *The Form and Function of the Body of the Greek Letter: A Study of the Letter-Body in the Non-Literary Papyri*

the Pauline corpus. Within each category it will be examined how it corresponds to our model of news as event, story and product; in short, is this an example of the apostle Paul sharing news? It is important to be clear that this section is an exercise not in seeing *how* Paul handles news, or which category of news might be most useful for our later theological enquiry but rather simply identifying the stories and texts which are the starting point for his news. What follows is thus a thorough examination of six categories of news which may be identified in the Pauline corpus, concluding with an assessment of the degree to which the apostle Paul may be said to handle news. Only after this has been completed will an assessment be made of which texts will be taken forward for our later theological model.

2.3.2. Gospel – the Good News

An obvious place to start an examination of news in Paul is with the category of the *euaggelion*, usually translated as the 'gospel', or 'good news'. While Paul is responsible for the majority of the word's use in the New Testament, it is unlikely that he initiated its usage as the term to describe the message of God's saving work in Jesus Christ.[32] One suggestion is that it came to prominence in the Greek-speaking mission as a development from the verbal form *euaggelizomai* which was in turn dependent on the influence of Isaiah 61:1-2 in the early Christian church.[33] What is not contested, however, is the meaning of the word and its cognates, namely as an expression of the fact that the early Christians had a message to proclaim and news to share which was of benefit to those who heard it. It is this usage that Paul adopts, using *euaggelion* in a range of ways to convey the message of good news from and concerning God and Christ (Rom 1:1, 9, 16 to use examples

---

and in Paul the Apostle (Missoula, Mont: Society of Biblical Literature for the Seminar on Paul, 1972).

[32] James D.G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998), 164-169.

[33] James D.G. Dunn, *Romans 1-8*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 38a (Dallas, Texas: Word Books, 1988), 10. It is also the case, however, that the noun is used in imperial propoganda, so there may be some element of counter-imperial stance, together with a note of 'official' news in the Pauline use of the term.

from just the opening chapter of Romans). Even when Paul does not use the word *euaggelion*, it is clearly the general sense of good news that acts as a motivating factor (e.g. 2 Cor 5:11-21).[34]

For the purposes of this thesis, however, it must be explored whether this *euaggelion* and the ideas behind it can be justly regarded as a category of news which Paul found himself handling. Paul uses the term in a range of contexts, and a clear pattern of meaning is hard to establish. It is possible, though, to construct two distinct ways in which *euaggelion* corresponds to the model of news as event, story and product. First, there is the use of *euaggelion* in the broadest sense, to describe the general message of Paul's preaching and apostolic ministry.[35] In this instance the 'event' is the Christ-event at its most wide-ranging level; the birth, life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ are to varying degrees implied as the core elements of the good news (Rom 1:1-4).[36] In some senses this is the past aspect of the gospel, the events which are at the heart of the good news. The 'story' is the effect that Paul believes this Christ-event message has on believers; the Christ-event matters (and therefore becomes a story in the way we are defining that word) because of the impact it has, both in the present and in the future, on the whole world, Jew and Gentile. Rom 1:16-17 is the classic formulation of this conviction, but it also underlies his use of *euaggelion* in Phil 1:3-11 and 4:3, 15. The 'product' is the whole sum of Paul's christological and theological writings. The book of Romans is regarded by some as the presentation of the *euaggelion* in its broadest sense; in this case Romans 1:16-17 is taken as the thematic summary of the chapters

---

[34] See Peter Stuhlmacher, "The Pauline Gospel," in *The Gospel and the Gospels*, ed. Peter Stuhlmacher (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1991), 149-172 for the development of Paul's understanding of gospel throughout his ministry.

[35] Romans 15:19, 20; 1 Corinthians 4:15; Galatians 2:7; Philippians 1:5.

[36] Clearly at the heart of these events for Paul is the cross of Christ (Gal 6:14) but the events are not restricted to this.

to follow.[37] Using this model the majority of Paul's ministry, preaching and writing may be regarded as dealing with and handling the news of the Christ-event in its widest sense.[38]

There is a more specific way in which the *euaggelion* may be regarded as 'news' in the sense we are defining it in this study. When Paul uses the term in 1 Corinthians 15:1, while he implies the general message of the beneficial impact of the Christ event, he links it closely with a set of more specific data and therefore a tighter understanding of the news (15:3-8). The 'event' is thus the events surrounding Easter: the death of Christ, his resurrection on the third day, together with his subsequent appearances. The 'story' is made clear first of all by the introduction of vv1-3, but also by the rest of ch 15 in which Paul argues for the vital importance of the historicity of the resurrection as the basis for future hope (vv12-19). The 'product' is in this case the whole of chapter 15, Paul's formal expression of the events and a careful explanation of the reason they matter. While 1 Corinthians 15 is the clearest example of this narrower understanding of news in Paul, it is also to be seen in the Lord's Supper narrative of 1 Corinthians 11:23-26 and perhaps also the credal formulation of Philippians 2:6-11. In both texts 'news' is a certain sub-set of data about the Christ-event which Paul is passing on as a story that matters.

2.3.3. Paul's Conversion

Paul's Damascus road experience represents a turning point not only in his own life but in the history of the early church. The nature of this turning is one sharply debated by modern scholars: K. Stendahl in his book *Paul Among Jews and Gentiles* suggests that what had previously been traditionally regarded as a conversion from

---

[37] Dunn, *Romans 1-8*, 37-39. Although there are strong arguments in the other direction, namely that Romans was more situationally contingent. See A.J.M. Wedderburn, *The Reasons for Romans* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991).

[38] It is recognised that these distinctions are somewhat arbitrary; for Paul the heart of the gospel is as much what it has achieved for Jew and Gentile as the events of Jesus' life, death and resurrection.

one religion to another was actually a call to be the apostle to the Gentiles, and thus Paul's story is increasingly seen by some not as a paradigmatic story of Christian conversion, but rather a unique apostolic call.[39] Yet while the precise nature of the conversion may remain unclear, the significance of the event itself, both for Paul and the early church, is beyond doubt.[40] Initial evidence for this may be found in the story's threefold appearance within the Acts narrative.[41] Yet while these accounts provide much of the data of what happened on the road to Damascus and also demonstrate the importance of the event in Luke's understanding of the development of the Gentile mission and Paul's defence of it, they cannot form the primary texts that need to be considered for this thesis. The specific focus is how Paul handles news himself, and so the need will be to have primarily in mind the places where he refers to his conversion first-hand[42] as the critical questions are asked whether the Damascus road event can be regarded as a category of Pauline news, and whether Paul's handling of it suggests it will prove an area for fruitful study.[43]

On one level it is easy to see how Paul's conversion fits into a model of news as event, story and product. The event is what happened as the then Saul approached Damascus on the road from Jerusalem: the blinding light, the voice of Jesus addressing Saul, the ensuing meeting with Ananias concluding with restoration of

---

[39] Krister Stendahl, *Paul among Jews and Gentiles, and Other Essays* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976), 7-23.

[40] Alan Segal discusses at some length the impact the conversion had on Paul's theology. Alan F. Segal, *Paul the Convert: The Apostolate and the Apostasy of Saul the Pharisee* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1990), 117-183.

[41] In Acts 9:1-20 Luke tells the story as a historical narrative; the other accounts, in Acts 22:1-21 and 26:2-23 are found in Paul's speeches before the Jews and King Agrippa.

[42] Galatians 1:11-17 and Philippians 3:3-17.

[43] Segal raises the interesting question of whether Paul's vision in 2 Corinthians 12 may refer to his conversion, but considers it is just as likely that it refers to a revelation both similar and subsequent to his conversion. Segal, *Paul the Convert*, 36-37. See also a discussion on whether Romans 7:7-25 can be taken to refer to Paul's conversion in J.M Everts, "Conversion and Call of Paul," in *Dictionary of Paul and his Letters*, ed. Gerald F. Hawthorne and Ralph P. Martin (Leicester: IVP, 1993).

sight and baptism.[44] These occurrences over three days in ca. AD34/35 form the genesis of the news story.[45] Yet the reason why these events became a story relates not to the discrete elements of the event at all, but rather to the impact they had on Saul himself. The story was of the changed behaviour of Saul who turned from being a zealous opponent of the early followers of Jesus to an exponent of Jesus as the Son of God (Acts 9:20). Thus it was the context of Saul's previous life that made the events of the Damascus road so remarkable. According to Luke this was commented on at the time by people who heard the changed Saul preach (Acts 9:21), but Paul also expected his Galatian readers around twenty years later to be aware of this context (Gal 1:13, also 1:23) and thus, why the events on that road became a story. This implied rejection of all in his life that he had previously valued forms the background to his words in Philippians 3:4-7; the story here is of a man who as a Jew had everything and yet cast it all aside in favour of knowing Christ as Lord.[46] The 'product' component of the news model may be found in the two passages we have already mentioned - Galatians 1:11-17 and Philippians 3:3-17. In these two passages Paul refers to his conversion experience in broad terms and in each case uses the story to reinforce his wider theological point. In these two places we have an example of how Paul manages this piece of news about himself and his past. Hence the conversion of Paul may be regarded as a piece of news as I have defined it: in the facts of the Damascus road we see an event; in the impact it had on Paul we find a story; and in Paul's own reflection of it in two of his letters we can trace a product.

---

[44] These are the common features from the accounts in Acts 9:1-20; 22:1-21 and 26:2-23.

[45] See Richard N. Longenecker, *Galatians*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 41 (Dallas, Texas: Word Books, 1990), lxxii-lxxxviii for a thorough examination of the possible dates of Paul's conversion. Also Witherington, *Paul Quest*, 304-327.

[46] Cf. Stendahl, *Paul among Jews and Gentiles*, 8-9. I am not arguing that the story is of Paul being rescued from a slough of despond, but rather that on discovering Christ, the life with which he had previously been so satisfied, was now worthless.

2.3.4. Paul's Sufferings

A feature of Paul's letters, and especially his Corinthian correspondence, is the lists of sufferings and afflictions which Paul tells his readers have happened to him.[47] These have attracted considerable critical interest as scholars seek to identify why Paul lists such hardships, how he does so, and more specifically how much he draws on prevailing rhetorical and philosophical models.[48] These are important questions to consider but for us the immediate question to address is whether these lists may be properly regarded as examples of 'news' in Paul.

The first question to ask is what events lie behind these passages. In some cases this is easy to identify, but in others it is much less clear. Thus it is possible to have some certainty about the episode in Damascus to which Paul refers in 2 Corinthians 11:32-33; not only does the mention of King Aretas make some preliminary dating possible, but this episode is also referred to in Acts 9:23-25.[49] The location for Paul's imprisonment referred to in Philippians 1:12-14 may be narrowed down to a handful of possibilities and a good argument may be made for it being Rome.[50] Other passages, however, are much harder to confirm. This is either because Paul is relatively vague in his reference (as in 2 Cor 1:8-11 where the reference to Asia opens up a range of possibilities;[51] also 1 Cor 4:8-13 and 2 Cor 12:7-10), or because

---

[47] 1 Corinthians 4:8-13; 2 Corinthians 1:3-11; 4:7-12; 6:3-10; 11:23-33; 12:1-10; Philippians 1:12-14. Romans 8:35 is sometimes included in this list.

[48] Anthony Thiselton provides a useful summary of the available literature. Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2000), 356-358. Robert Hodgson sets out the different types of hardship lists that Paul mentions, and shows similar examples from ancient literature. Robert Hodgson, "Paul the Apostle and First Century Tribulation Lists," *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche*, no. 74 (1983) 59-80.

[49] Probably between AD 37-39 – see Ralph P. Martin, *2 Corinthians*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 40 (Waco, Texas: Word Books, 1986), 385.

[50] Gordon D. Fee, *Paul's Letter to the Philippians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1995), 34-37.

[51] See E.B. Allo, *Saint Paul. Seconde Epître aux Corinthiens* (Paris: Librairie Lecoffre, 1937), 15-19 who discusses the options and concludes that it is most likely to have been *un grave accès de maladie*; also C.K. Barrett, *A Commentary on the Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (London:

the number of hardships listed are so numerous as to make a systematic attempt to seek correspondence with external data extremely hard (as in 2 Cor 11:23-29). Yet although it is often difficult to be entirely clear what specific episode Paul is referring to, there is no suggestion that the events themselves did not happen. Indeed, for example, while it is not possible to find in the book of Acts the numbers of afflictions listed in 2 Corinthians 11:23-29, it is entirely in line with the shape of Luke's narrative that such events took place; Acts includes a number of accounts of Paul's imprisonments, floggings, attacks, journeys and shipwrecks.[52] The general pattern of Paul's life as we receive it from these lists of hardship is wholly consistent with the picture from Luke's narrative.

The reason why these events become a 'story' is a complex one; it touches on areas of profound theological significance, and thus the reasons may only be sketched here.[53] First, some of the events become a story because they are in themselves dramatic. Shipwrecks and stonings, although more common then than now, were striking events to readers in the ancient world; these events would become news stories in almost any context. Second, these events become a story because they are not what the readers in Corinth expect of an apostle. Owing both to the general sociological and philosophical background of the church at Corinth, there seemed to be in that Christian community an expectation that the mark of an apostle of Jesus Christ was to reflect success and glory.[54] Thus the events from Paul's life which show him exposed to hardship and affliction acquire news value in a context which expected more of an apostle. To the historian Luke, who was used to witnessing

---

Adam & Charles Black, 1973), 63-64 who comes to a similar conclusion. Yet neither can be very sure.

[52] E.g. Acts 16:16-40; 21:1-16; 27: 13-44.

[53] For more see Thiselton, *1 Corinthians*, 365-368.

[54] See 1 Corinthians 1:18-25; 2:1-5; 4:6-13; 2 Cor 10:7-18; 11:5-6, 12-15 – also Ibid., 1-52 on the sociological and philosophical context of Corinth and Witherington, *Conflict and Community in Corinth*, 345-351 on the possible sophistic influence on Paul's opponents in 2 Corinthians. Also Barrett, *Second Corinthians*, 48-50 on the false apostles' *theologia gloriae* and Wolfgang Schrage, *Der erste Brief an die Korinther* (Zürich und Braunschweig: Benziger Verlag, 1991), 333 for an exploration of Paul's contrasting *theologia crucis.*

such things, imprisonment might not be dramatic news; to the 'signs and wonders' church at Corinth it certainly was. Finally, these hardship events become news stories because Paul chooses to make them stories. In 2 Corinthians 1:8 he uses the revelatory formula 'We do not want you to be unaware'; this is a man who is deliberately and intentionally handling news about himself. In this we see clearly the product phase of the news process: in these passages Paul is setting out in epistolary form the news about his own hardship, so that this news may be carefully reflected on by others.

2.3.5. Paul's Travel Plans

As might be expected of a man who did so much travelling, Paul wrote a good deal about his travel plans, past, present and future.[55] Given the large number of instances of such comment, for the purpose of this thesis it is important to ask whether such passages are examples of a distinct category of news in Paul; is news about his travel plans something Paul found himself handling often, and was it an important subject to him? In certain passages the 'event' element of the news is quite prosaic: either simply the hope Paul has to visit (1 Cor 16:5-9 and Philem 22) or a rather detailed explanation of the journeys that still face the apostle (Rom 15:22-29). Likewise, the implicit story is a straightforward one: Paul is revealing some information about when he might visit the various Christian communities; as one of the foremost leaders of the Gentile church this was of obvious interest to those early churches. The product in these cases is a relatively uncomplicated couple of verses about how Paul sees his proposed future journeys.

In at least one passage, however, the news about Paul's travel plans is considerably more complex. In 2 Corinthians 1:12-2:4, the event in question is not Paul's future plans, but the failure of his past travel plans. It is hard to be certain about the chronology of Paul's visits to Corinth, but it appears that his plans had altered since

---

[55] Romans 15:22-29; 1 Corinthians 16:5-9; 2 Corinthians 1:12-2:4; 1 Thessalonians 2:17-3:5; Philemon 22.

he wrote 1 Corinthians 16:5-9 and it was now in his mind to visit Corinth twice, once briefly on his way to Macedonia, and a longer visit on the way back (2 Cor 1:16).[56] However, because the first visit was so painful, Paul did not make the second longer visit (2 Cor 2:1), and was apparently criticised for this non-appearance. The event in question is thus not the plans themselves, but Paul's non-arrival in Corinth. It is easy to see how this non-arrival became a story. Relationships between Paul and the Corinthian church were always tense, and in AD55, the period probably referred in 2 Corinthians 1, this was particularly the case; Paul's change of mind on his travel plans thus acquired a deeper significance than it might have done. The story became not one of Paul's practical itinerary but of his reliability as an apostle. If his travel plans could not be trusted, then how could he, his gospel and his God be trusted (2 Cor 1:17-18)?[57] Thus this category of news is about much more than simply where Paul is going and when.

2.3.6. Galatian Autobiography

Galatians 1:11-2:14 has been touched on before in our examination of Paul's conversion narratives, but we must consider briefly whether the wider picture of Paul's autobiographical detail constitutes a category of news useful for our research focus. The events described in these verses are at once both straightforward and fiendishly complex. As well as the conversion narrative Paul outlines certain other key events: a first visit to Jerusalem (1:18-19), travels in Syria and Cilicia (1:21), a further visit to Jerusalem in which James, Peter and John affirm Paul's mission to the Gentiles (2:1-10), and a confrontation with Peter in Antioch (2:11-14). Yet the

---

[56] See Martin, *2 Corinthians*, xlvi for a possible chronology of the planned and actual visits. Also Paul Barnett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1997), 9-15.

[57] None of this intensity is found in the other passages pertaining to Paul's itinerary. 1 Thessalonians 2:17-3:5 comprises Paul's expression of his desire to see the Thessalonians again, with only the slightest reference to his own plans (3:1). In Romans 15:22 there is the suggestion that Paul is explaining why he has hitherto been unable to visit the church in Rome, but otherwise the story is the collection in Jerusalem (see 3.2.6. below). The background to 1 Corinthians 16:5-9 seems to be the reality that Paul did actually plan to visit the troubled church, but it is no stronger than that.

chronology of these events is problematic; much revolves around whether the Jerusalem meeting of Galatians 2:1-10 is the same as the Jerusalem council of Acts 15:1-29, or whether it refers to Acts 11:27-30 or somewhere else.[58] Whatever the case, and even if we never know their date or precise context, there are clearly events at the heart of this passage, events which Paul believed to be highly significant. However, their news value, and thus their place within the 'story' phase of our news model, is determined as much by the Galatian context as it is Paul's own understanding of the events themselves. As was the case with the conversion narrative, the motivating factor behind Paul making these events into news stories is the overarching themes of the letter: the nature of the gospel to the Gentiles against the influence of the Judaizers, and the integrity of Paul as an apostle to the Gentiles. In this context the stories of the meetings in Jerusalem and Antioch seem to acquire special significance as Paul uses them to argue his point of justification by faith (2:16).[59] It is straightforward to see how these verses might be regarded as a news product; in Galatians 1:12-2:14 Paul carefully sets out both the events behind the news and the reason why they matter. This passage is an attempt by Paul to handle the news of the affirmation of his Gentile gospel and mission in such a way as to have maximum impact on the Galatian audience.

2.3.7. Collection for the Saints

The final category of news to be examined briefly is the collection for the church in Jerusalem. This is mentioned in a number of Paul's letters and was clearly of great importance in the course of his ministry.[60] May this be regarded as a category of

---

[58] See Longenecker, *Galatians*, lxxii-lxxxviii for a full exploration of the options involved.

[59] Note however the interesting suggestion by George Lyons that Paul's autobiographical comments are less dependent on the opponents' point of view and more a result of his rhetorical technique to establish his own character and *ethos*. George Lyons, *Pauline Autobiography: Toward a New Understanding*, Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series (Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1985), 123-176. See also Witherington, *Conflict and Community in Corinth*, 204-205.

[60] Romans 15:25-27; 1 Corinthians 16:1-4; 2 Corinthians 8 and 9. There is also a suggestion that Paul is alluding to the collection in Galatians 6:6-10. See Larry W. Hurtado, "The

news within the Pauline corpus? The event behind the news is clear: following on from his meeting in Jerusalem (Gal 2:10) when Paul was asked to remember the poor, the apostle started a campaign for funds ostensibly to relieve the poverty of the Jerusalem community.[61] 1 Corinthians 16:1-4 suggests that it was Paul's practice to encourage churches to set aside money systematically for the Jerusalem collection, and, as evidenced by 2 Corinthians 8:1-4, some churches responded very generously indeed. The reasons why this event became a story are several: in 2 Corinthians 8:8-9 Paul links the collection with the believers' own appreciation of what Christ has done for them and their desire to help others; thus the story becomes what the collection can say about the reader's own faith. In Romans 15:27 he casts the theological net wider, reminding his readers of their need to be aware of, and thankful for, the blessings they enjoy which were originally part of the covenant made with Israel; in this case the story is of the unity of the church and how Paul can further it. The product is the way in which Paul sets down in his letters the events surrounding the collection, and its importance in the life of the church.

It is worth reflecting at slightly greater length, however, on one of the texts associated with the Jerusalem collection, where Paul is clearly sharing news with considerable intent. For in 2 Corinthians 8:1-5 Paul quite deliberately shares with his Corinthian audience the news of the generous response of the Macedonian churches to the collection for the Jerusalem church. The 'event' is thus relatively easy to identify: together with other early churches, the Macedonian church had participated in a collection for their brother and sister believers in Jerusalem. The story of the Macedonian collection, however is this: despite their own affliction (v2), the church gave an amount that was sacrificial (v3) and unexpected (v4). Theirs was

---

Jerusalem Collection and the Book of Galatians," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament*, no. 5 (1979) 46-62.

[61] This is, of course, only one of the reasons implied in Paul's letters. For more on the genesis and aim of the collection see Dieter Georgi, *Remembering the Poor: The History of Paul's Collection for Jerusalem* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1992).

a remarkable generosity in the face of personal hardship;[62] that they begged Paul for the chance to share in the Jerusalem collection is a story worth sharing. The product of this example of news is thus the narrative of 2 Corinthians 8:1-5; Paul deliberately introduces his injunction to the Corinthian church to complete their collection with this reportage of the Macedonian response. 'We want you to know' (v1) speaks of Paul's commitment to the importance of the news he is sharing.

2.3.8 Conclusions

The above discussion is not designed to be an exhaustive examination of all the news which the apostle Paul found himself handing, but it does point us towards some preliminary conclusions concerning the apostle and his use of news, independent of the question of which of these categories might best serve as a theological framework for our later critique of contemporary practice. It is clear from the above survey that it is possible to speak of the apostle handling news in his correspondence. Using our broad model of news based around event, story and product it has been possible to identify six types of news in the Pauline corpus which the apostle found himself handling at one time or another. This news is extremely varied in nature; its content extends from the apostle himself (his conversion, meetings in Jerusalem and Antioch, travel plans and sufferings) to other events (the Jerusalem collection), as well as third parties (the actions of God in Jesus Christ, together with the response of the Macedonian church to the Jerusalem collection). While, perhaps unsurprisingly, the majority of news which Paul handles is about himself, this is by no means exclusively the case.

We can conclude, therefore, that not only was Paul in a context where there was widespread sharing of news, but also that as a key figure in the early church he was an active participant in this process. Paul's letters are clearly much more than

---

[62] Whether the 'deep poverty' which Paul refers to in v2 is mainly financial is far from clear. It may be that their poverty relates more to their social exclusion as persecuted believers rather than their lack of material means. See discussion in Barnett, *2 Corinthians*, 392-394.

newsletters to the early churches; the passages which contain news stories are often heavy with theological meaning and import, but they still fit in with the model of news identified earlier in this study. In Paul's letters we see the apostle sharing information about himself and others with a wider audience; this is news. That he was doing so in a manner and in a context which is different to that employed and witnessed today should not deflect us from the conclusion that Paul can be located within the same general space as today's Christian communicators charged with handling news. The technology and audience were perhaps more limited than often the case today, but the core activity is still sufficiently similar. Indeed, the potential greater correlation in communicative practice between the apostle Paul and contemporary Christian practitioners of news handling gives greater impetus to the question of which category of news will be examined in more depth and used as a resource to understand the broad theological issues at stake in Paul's communicative behaviour, with particular respect to news.

2.4. Reviewing Categories of News in Paul

2.4.1. Introduction

The aim of this section is to review the categories of news identified in the Pauline letters and reach a conclusion as to which texts will be examined in more detail and used for a theological critique of contemporary practice. Clearly, the selection of texts for the theological framework is an important part of this study; it will determine the direction of the research and shape its final conclusions. It is essential, therefore, to be clear about the criteria which will be used in this selection. In this introduction I will outline the criteria used to review the categories of news, before reviewing each set of texts and forming a judgement about which data will be used for our theological critique.

It needs to be recognised at the outset that using each of the categories of news in significant detail is neither possible nor wise. As we will see, certain texts do not actually lend themselves to the use that this study requires; however, even if all the

texts were equally useful, we would still have to make choices for reasons of space. It is better to study a small number of texts in considerable detail rather than undertake a superficial reading of many different texts. At the outset of this thesis I set out the clear parameter that this study does not aim to describe what the entire Pauline corpus has to say about the apostle's communicative theory and method; rather it is necessarily restricted in its focus. Any conclusions will thus not represent the final assessment of the apostle's news handling, but it is hoped that it will nevertheless represent a coherent presentation of an important part of Paul's thinking and practice.

There are three key questions I will bear in mind as I review the categories of news in Paul. First, is this a body of data that could potentially produce a theological framework for handling news? That is to say, is it possible to discern clearly not only what the news is that is being shared, but also with some confidence to assess the theological motivations that are behind that news handling? Certain texts may contain clear examples of news, but actually lack the required theological depth. Other texts may be so complex as to make a theological assessment highly problematic.

The second question is this: to what extent is this category of news a category typical of the apostle Paul? To ask this question is to consider whether a particular form of news is an example of Paul handling news on a one-off basis or something he found himself doing on a number of occasions. The implication behind this consideration is that if Paul pursued a particular form of news sharing more than once, it is more likely that it was part of a settled pattern of communication that was based on certain theological understandings and principles. It is also the case that a number of similar examples of news handling give firmer ground on which to draw out a theological framework.

Third, I will ask: is there potentially some correlation here between the news handling undertaken by Paul and that undertaken by contemporary Christian communicators? That correlation might be in the nature of the subject matter, the context of the communication, or any other aspect of the news handling. It does not need to be the case that there is exact correspondence between the practice of Paul and that of today's news handlers (we have already seen that because of the differing contexts this highly unlikely to occur) but the suggestion of some correlation might indicate that a particular category of news has a distinctive contribution to make to a theological critique of contemporary practice. I am not going to go through each of these three questions with each of the categories of news, but they will form the framework for the discussion below as I examine the categories again to decide which ones will be selected for later discussion.

2.4.2. Gospel – The Good News

Although an examination of the 'good news' in Paul was the obvious place to start a taxonomy of news in the apostle's letters, the two sub-categories outlined in section 2.3.2. above are in their separate ways both problematic when viewed as a potential resource for a theological critique for contemporary practice. The first sub-category – the Christ-event in its global sense – suffers from the handicap of being so general it is hard to reach firm conclusions in any area. Not only is the debate surrounding what exactly the gospel is for Paul a complex and contested one, but to examine how Paul handles this information will involve a study of almost the entire Pauline corpus.[63] This may be an interesting study, but it is not one that can be undertaken here; the amount of data means it would be almost impossible to reach even tentative conclusions in the space available in this study. The second sub-category – certain specific data about the Christ-event which Paul is passing on from others – suffers from the opposite problem. It is so narrow in its understanding of news that any assessment of how Paul handles the data will be necessarily limited in its

---

[63] See A.B. Luter Jr., "Gospel," in *Dictionary of Paul and his Letters*, ed. Gerald F. Hawthorne and Ralph P. Martin (Leicester: IVP, 1993), 370 for further discussion.

application. It may be of use for the evangelist seeking a model of how to crystallise the evangelistic message; for the contemporary communicator handling everyday news about themselves or a third party its relevance is much less secure. Thus while it is possible to speak of the gospel as news in the sense it is being defined for this thesis, the texts in question are not likely to be fertile ground for establishing the theological ideas framing Paul's communicative world view.

2.4.3. Paul's Conversion

The events of that Damascus road have *prima facie* all the hallmarks of a news story from the New Testament and one that raises hopes of providing data for wider theological reflection on how the story is handled. On two occasions Paul shares news of this most pivotal life event; there would seem to be value here for any communicator sharing dramatic or significant news. Yet it appears that in his letters Paul himself chooses to handle a different story, one not about the events of that Damascus road *per se*, but about how the impact of those events has meaning for the two communities to which he is writing. The differences in style, genre and content between the account in Galatians and Philippians on the one hand, and Luke's accounts of Paul's words in Acts 22 and 26 on the other should alert one to the fact in his letters Paul is using the story of his conversion in a particular way to address a prevailing theological issue.

In Galatians the conversion account is placed in the context of Paul's defence of the gospel he has proclaimed to the Gentiles, against the assumed opposition from the Judaizers who would see Gentile Christians circumcised and keep at least some of the law.[64] In order to defend the gospel Paul senses the need to emphasise the divine and revelatory nature of his own call (Gal 1:11-12). Consequently the account is remarkably short on detail of what actually happened and more focussed on the divine origin of the gospel he has proclaimed and the lack of intervention

---

[64] Cf. Longenecker, *Galatians*, lxxxix-c for more on the exact identity of the opponents.

from any human agency (Gal 1:15-17).[65] Because the event of Paul's conversion was already known by the readers of the letter the 'story' of vv14-16 is less a first-hand news account and more an editorial on an event which was already widely known and discussed. It is for this reason that the news of Paul's conversion seems almost subsumed under a heavier theological agenda; there is apparently little 'story' visible. The same is true of the Philippian account: although it is less clear than in Galatians, Philippians 3:2-3 give the impression that Paul is facing some Judaizing tendencies in the church,[66] and so Paul tells the story of his conversion from the point of view of someone who regards all the credits of his previous life as 'rubbish' (3:8). It is on this basis that Paul makes an appeal for the Christians in Philippi to follow his example of being transformed to be like Christ (3:15-17).

In a sense the conversion narratives of Galatians 1 and Philippians 3 are not about Paul's conversion at all but much more about the churches Paul is addressing. On one level this is an interesting example of how 'managed' the news process can be, in that the original story almost disappears, but for the purpose of our thesis it represents a significant problem. The very specific contexts in which these conversion narratives appear, and their clear and specific theological focus, render their value as resources for wider theological thinking on how Paul handles news questionable. Paul's conversion *is* news, for a whole range of reasons, but the texts from Paul which refer to it may not be as fruitful ground for theological exploration as one might expect.

2.4.4. Paul's Sufferings

The apostle's own sufferings form a category of news to which he returns again and again; indeed, this is one of their most striking characteristics. Eight references were detailed above, and this goes up to nine if one includes 2 Timothy 3:10-11, a passage

---

[65] The reason for the lack of the detail seems to be because Paul assumes they are fully aware of his conversion story – see Galatians 1:13.

[66] See Fee, *Philippians*, 293-297 on what the opponents seem to have been asking for and why.

from a contested letter but one in which, at the very least, the author was trying to be consistent with Pauline theology and style. These passages come from five different letters; while the majority are found in the Corinthian correspondence the phenomenon of Paul sharing news of his own hardship is far from being peculiar to those two letters. Reports of his own personal suffering seem to be one of the most characteristic features of Paul's news handling. The question is, however: why does Paul devote so much time to sharing news about his own difficulties? It is no doubt an interesting question to ask; there is certainly plenty of data here from which to construct a theological understanding of why he chooses to communicate this news in the way he does. One shortcoming is perhaps is that this news is all about the apostle himself whereas for contemporary communicators handling news is usually not about themselves but about the church or Christian organisation they work for. There is, therefore, perhaps something of a gap in relevance that would need to be bridged. That notwithstanding, the general theological understandings which underlie Paul's repeated pattern of communicative behaviour are likely be of considerable interest to explore.

2.4.5. Paul's Travel Plans

It is certainly possible to speak of Paul's travel plans as a category of news within his letters; in the passages mentioned above there are events, stories and products that we might examine in some detail. However, we must note that with the exception of 2 Corinthians 1:12-2:4, the nature of the news is straightforward and prosaic, and Paul's handling of it, from the perspective of his communicative behaviour, is thus of limited interest. It is tending much more towards a simple transfer of information than any form of more complex news handling which promises to be of greater theological interest. However, the 2 Corinthians passage is different and shows Paul dealing with difficult news under pressure; at stake are his integrity and reliability, and thus the amount of symbolic value invested in the way he handles the news of his change of plan is considerable. Here it may well be possible to find a model of news handling which is of particular relevance for the

person handling news under pressure, when the integrity of themselves or their organisation is at stake. Nevertheless, it remains the case that this is only one passage from a number that has the depth required for a theological enquiry into Paul's news handling. While a study of it would be interesting, there remains the danger that to draw any theological pattern from this one passage would be to place a greater burden on it than it can reasonably be expected to bear.

2.4.6. Galatian Autobiography

Galatians 1:12-2:14 may indeed be taken as a category of news in Paul; it is autobiographical information about Paul's own conversion, mission and ministry. It has a general coherence with the model of news being used in this study: there are definite events referred to (even if it is far from clear when these events took place); there are understandable reasons why in the Galatian context these events came to be regarded by Paul as stories of news value; and the result is a carefully packaged presentation of apparently autobiographical news. Here is Paul handling news under pressure; the news is of his own history, and at stake is his own integrity and authenticity as an apostle. For the communicator seeking to handle news about a complex past, this would seem to be a rich passage with which to engage. However, it must be recognised that this is only one example of Paul handling this sort of news in such depth; in order to draw out a theological framework that might have wider relevance there is a need to tread carefully.

2.4.7. Collection for the Saints

The collection for the saints in Jerusalem may justifiably be seen as a news story within Paul's letters, and the particular passage from 2 Corinthians 8:1-5 would seem to have considerable potential as a text with which to engage. Here Paul is mirroring the work of many a contemporary communicator: using news from a third party and presenting in such a way as to make his own point. In this particular example Paul is hoping that the news will have an impact; 'we want you to know' illustrates how keen Paul is to get his message across. He clearly expects

his news to have a transformative effect, encouraging the Corinthians to be generous themselves. Thus Paul is sharing a story with a specific aim; this is news handling at its most deliberate, a practice which we as have discussed is increasingly common in today's contested news culture. It would seem that this passage could perhaps disclose a theological framework that would be of considerable relevance to the contemporary communicator. The only proviso is that the data available are relatively slim; with only five verses it would be important not to overclaim about Paul's communicative thinking and practice from this passage alone.

2.4.8. Conclusions

It has been demonstrated above that while some of the categories would seem problematic for the particular use we have in mind, a number of different paths suggest themselves. First, it would be possible to look at Paul's narrative of his travel plans, and the complexities thereof, in 2 Corinthians 1:12-2:4 and see whether a theological framework could be discerned that would help those who are dealing with news around questions of reliability and integrity. Here the message might be one of facing challenges and meeting them head-on. Second, it would be feasible to consider what theological assumptions are behind the autobiographical account of Galatians 1:12-2:14; here there might be lessons about truthfulness and visibility in handling controversial news. Third, a route with considerable potential would be to look at the passage concerning the Jerusalem collection in 2 Corinthians 8:1-5, and in particular the report of Macedonian church's generosity. Here it would hopefully be possible to trace a theological approach which would have relevance for the many Christian communicators today using news stories to serve a wider agenda of encouragement and nurture.

While each of these three paths is highly suggestive, and would undoubtedly repay further study, they are not the texts I will be choosing for the rest of this thesis. This is not simply because of the relative thinness of the data for each category, although

this is a consideration, but rather because of the strength of the case that can be made for the remaining category of news. For in assessing the news employed by the apostle Paul, there seems to me to be one obvious set of texts to examine further, and these are the passages in which Paul relates news of his own hardship. Quite simply, it is the news which Paul handles most often; in as far as it is possible to speak of Paul having one characteristic to his news, this is it. On a number of different occasions, and in several different contexts, he shares news of his own suffering and difficulties. The quantity and quality of available data and its clear importance to the apostle all make this a highly promising avenue to explore. Indeed, to look at Pauline news without considering in detail this most prevalent model of news would seem to me to be a serious oversight. In the following section I will explore further why and how the Corinthian hardship narratives will serve as the theological focus for this study.

2.5. The Corinthian Hardship Narratives as Focus for Theological Analysis

I concluded above that the one category of Pauline news which most merits further study is the group of passages where Paul shares news about his own hardship and suffering as an apostle. That this is the most common form of news which Paul shares in his letters is significant: the number of occurrences suggests not only that Paul regarded this type of news story as important within his own pattern of communication, but also that there will be enough data on which to base some tentative conclusions about Paul's approach to news handling. Moreover, an initial reading of the passages indicates that on some occasions Paul tells of his own hardship in the context of defending his own apostolic ministry; there is thus the hint of deeper theological reasons behind Paul sharing these narratives as often as he does. Finally, if the texts are restricted to those from the Corinthian correspondence (which includes the majority of the texts), then a further reason for in depth analysis suggests itself. By limiting the focus to the communication to one

particular city, it is possible to examine in greater detail the features of that city and Christian community and thus place Paul's communicative behaviour against its proper context. In the case of Corinth there is considerable data available, and a survey of it has already persuaded one recent commentator that there is significant correlation between first century Corinth and today's cultural environment.

> With today's "postmodern" mood we may compare the self-sufficient, self-congratulatory culture of Corinth, coupled with an obsession about peer-group prestige, success in competition, their devaluing of tradition and universals, and near contempt for those without standing in some chosen value system. All this provides an embarrassingly close model of a postmodern context for the gospel in our own times, even given the huge historical differences and distances in so many other respects. Quite apart from its theology of grace, the cross, the Holy Spirit, the ministry, love and the resurrection, as an example of communicative action between the gospel and the world of given time, *1 Corinthians stands in a distinctive position of relevance to our own times.*[67]

It may be that the gap between Paul's context and that of today's communicators is not as great as one might imagine. The approach taken by this study will therefore be centred around the hardship narratives from Paul's Corinthian correspondence, in the belief that such an analysis, set against a rich description of the first-century communicative landscape, will take us deep into Paul's understanding of news, because it was a category of story that Paul handled more than any other.

Yet it is important to be clear at this stage of two provisos which must be borne in mind. First, it is recognised that this approach will not enable conclusions to be made about the entirety of Paul's news handling; while this is the category of news which Paul handled most frequently, we have seen that there are other texts that would repay further study. It is possible that these additional texts would produce conclusions which are to some degree distinct to those reached after consideration

---

[67] Thiselton, *1 Corinthians*, 16-17. (Thiselton's italics). I will argue in due course that much of what was the case at the time of 1 Corinthians remained so for 2 Corinthians.

of the Corinthian hardship narratives. Yet the existence of other texts does not invalidate looking at the Corinthian texts in detail; it merely serves as reminder that what emerges at the end will be *a* Pauline approach rather than *the* Pauline approach to news. This will be a point to return to in the conclusion to this study.

Second, it is not the aim of this study to discern in the hardship narratives of 1 and 2 Corinthians certain principles of communication which may be easily translated to contemporary news handling. Not only would such an approach be problematic because of the technological gap between Paul's era and our own, it would also imply that Christian communication was simply a question of following certain rules in order to achieve a satisfactory communicative outcome. Such an understanding of communication seems to dominate certain handbooks on handling news, but it is my assertion that for the Christian communicator the key questions to be asked are theological ones. That is to say, the important question is less *how* a communicator handles news, and more the way in which that practice is informed by their Christian faith and commitment. The critical questions to be asked of the Corinthian hardship narratives are thus theological: how are these examples of news handling informed by Paul's theological message? What theological insights render his communicative behaviour distinctive (if indeed it is so)? The aim is to establish a theological framework which will enable an effective critique to be made of contemporary news handling.

The Corinthian hardship narratives will be analysed using a model of communication based around production, text and reception.[68] This model, which promotes the examination of texts from the three different perspectives of how a text was produced, what its layers of meaning are, and how it is received by an intended audience, will be used to analyse the two case studies later on in this thesis, and thus for reasons of comparability it suggested itself for the examination

---

[68] I am grateful to my principal supervisor, Dr Jolyon Mitchell, for first suggesting this model as a useful one for this study.

of Pauline news. Although it is to some degree anachronistic to use a contemporary model of communication analysis to study the practice and approach of a first-century communicator, the reasons why researchers today use this model for examining examples of news are relevant for Pauline studies as well.[69] In the production analysis the focus is on the context in which, and the process by which, the story is produced and is an important reminder that texts do not occur in a vacuum; this stage will force us to take seriously the context in which Paul was communicating, a discipline which is now widely regarded as essential for reliable New Testament exegesis. The textual analysis recognises and seeks to uncover the different layers within a story; in this case it allows for substantial and detailed textual exegesis to take place. The reception analysis acknowledges, among other things, that news stories are to some extent shaped by the audience to whom they are being communicated; it will encourage us to take due consideration of the impact Paul's news might have had on his Corinthian audience, a question which, as we will see, was of some obvious importance to the apostolic writer. Thus the model of production, text and reception allows us to ask all the necessary questions of the hardship narratives themselves without specifying a particular form of analysis within each of the three perspectives.

The investigation of the stories of suffering in 1 and 2 Corinthians will hence proceed in three stages: first, the context of the Corinthian letters will be examined in some detail, together with Paul's own general approach to communication in and to that city; second, the texts will be subjected to close exegetical study leading to a theological analysis about Paul's priorities in sharing this news in such a way; finally, focus will be given to discovering how Paul's news of hardship might have been received by the community to which he was writing. Such an analysis will

---

[69] For a very fine example of this model of communication in use with regard to news see Miller and others, *Circuit of Mass Communication* . It must be recognised that this model is not yet in widespread use within media studies (or at all within theological studies), but that does nothing to take away from its usefulness as a model in this context.

prepare the ground for a summary of the theological challenge which Paul throws down to communicators within today's Christian church.

2.6. Conclusions

This has been a substantial chapter in which the key methodological questions of this thesis have been addressed. First, I outlined why I believe the apostle Paul has a distinctive contribution to make to a theological understanding of contemporary news handling. I showed how his ministry was exercised in a competitive and contested rhetorical environment, and how his immediate context was shaped by the giving and receiving of news, a practice of considerable importance to the early Christian communities. Building on the analysis of contemporary news in the previous chapter, I argued that the obvious differences in technology, culture and context should not obscure the potential similarities between some aspects of news sharing in the first century and today. I further demonstrated that Paul himself shared a range of news stories in his letters; I concluded that it is possible, therefore, to speak of the apostle handling news, even if the actual practice looked rather different in the first century from how it does today.

I then made a case for selecting a set of texts for more detailed examination. The categories of news were considered again with a view as to which texts might yield a theological framework for news which could be used for a critique of contemporary practice. All texts were reviewed, and a number of possible paths were identified; however, the group of texts which were selected were those passages which form the type of news story which is in many ways a hallmark of Paul's news sharing – the narratives of his own hardship. I outlined why the focus of this study, therefore, is on these passages in the letters to the church in Corinth, a city with some apparent similarities to contemporary Britain. The model used for this theological critique will be one of production, text and reception, with the aim of reaching a theological framework against which to measure contemporary practice. The next chapter will begin this task by addressing the particular cultural

and pastoral context into which Paul was writing, and examining the understanding Paul had of his own communicative behaviour.

3. PRODUCTION: THE CORINTHIAN CONTEXT AND 1 CORINTHIANS 2:1-5

3.1. Introduction

Analysing the production of the Corinthian hardship narratives involves setting them in the fullest possible context, both in terms of the cultural situation in Corinth, and the personal background of Paul's own theological position and communicative experience. This chapter has, therefore, two aims: first, to explore the context for Paul's Corinthian correspondence and thereby understand the nature of the communicative and pastoral challenge the apostle faced when he both visited and wrote to the church in Corinth; second, to understand how Paul, in the light of such a context, saw the task of communication and what relationship this model had to his overall theological agenda. To meet the first aim I will briefly outline the historical, social and religious environment in which the Christian community found themselves in Corinth, before considering in more detail the two specific aspects which are of greater application to this study, namely the rhetorical atmosphere that prevailed at the time of Paul's contact with the church, and the dynamics in the relationship between the Corinthians and the apostle himself. The second aim will be addressed by examining Paul's own agenda for communication as found in 1 Corinthians 2:1-5. I will argue that this passage is not only one of the few places where Paul explicitly addresses, and reflects on, his own communicative practice, but also that it can thus serve as a key text to understand what Paul rejected, what he espoused – and why – in his preaching and more general communication. The overall object of this chapter is thus to understand thoroughly the context in which Paul's hardship narratives were written and heard.

3.2. The Corinthian Context

3.2.1. Geography, history, society and religion

Although the city of Corinth, as Paul knew it, was destroyed by earthquake in AD521, sufficient archaeological and literary data remain to enable scholars to build

up a relatively full picture of the city and its characteristics.[1] The image which emerges is of a vibrant and confident city which epitomised the values and aspirations of the wider Greco-Roman culture, and which indeed in many ways gave these values and aspirations sharper focus and prominence. That the city was strategically placed is beyond doubt; its geographical location made it an ideal intersection between north and south, and east and west. It had two harbours, one facing east towards Asia and Ephesus, the other west towards Italy. A *diolkos*, or paved roadway, ran across the isthmus at its narrowest point, and cargo and even small ships were portaged across it.[2] It is thus easy to understand why, in 44 BC, Julius Caesar decided to establish a Roman colony on the old Corinthian site which had been largely destroyed by Mummius in 146 BC.[3] The new city, formed after a Roman model and not a Greek one, thrived and by AD50 was a centre of trade and commerce, and home to some of the finest buildings in the Empire.[4] When Paul visited Corinth, he was visiting a city at the height of its glory.

The society was a complex one. Its relatively recent foundation, the large number of freed slaves among its populace and its highly active commercial sector created the atmosphere in which people had significant social and material aspirations. It was possible for citizens to move rapidly up the social ladder, and there is archaeological evidence indicating that certain freedmen did just that.[5] Inevitably, this social atmosphere in which status mattered so much created its own tensions.[6] The high

---

[1] Thiselton, *1 Corinthians* ; Witherington, *Conflict and Community in Corinth* ; Timothy B. Savage, *Power through Weakness: Paul's Understanding of the Christian Ministry in 2 Corinthians*, Society of New Testament Studies 86 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Bruce W. Winter, *After Paul Left Corinth: The Influence of Secular Ethics and Social Change* (Grand Rapids, Mi: Eerdmans, 2001).

[2] Thiselton, *1 Corinthians*, 1-3.

[3] Savage, *Power through Weakness*, 35.

[4] Ibid., 36.

[5] Ibid., 39.

[6] E.A. Judge draws an interesting distinction between 'rank', denoting a formally defined position in society, and 'status', which refers to the position of influence that may not correspond to the official pattern of social order. That is to say, status could be acquired,

level of social mobility resulted in an equally high level of status anxiety. That is to say, the people who had reached the top of the social ladder had a good deal of concern about how they had got there and whether they could stay there.[7] Ben Witherington summarises it thus, 'Corinth was a city where an enterprising person could rise quickly through society through the accumulation and judicious use of newfound wealth. It seems that in Paul's time many in Corinth were already suffering from a self-made-person-escapes-humble-origins syndrome.'[8] Resulting from this status anxiety there was also a tendency to self-display and self-promotion which arose from a need for recognition. Scholars point to a number of inscriptions which show how leading citizens and benefactors seemed desperate to record their own achievements in order to acquire recognition from the wider community.[9] Finally, the commercial activity and social fluidity made for a highly competitive atmosphere. The famous Isthmian games, which took place nearby, are widely recognised both as a significant influence on the city of Corinth and also a metaphor for the more general competitive feel to that Roman colony.[10]

The religious life of Corinth was played out at a similarly intense level. The sheer diversity of the cultic presence is immediately striking. One reason for this was that Corinth, as a maritime trading centre, acquired a full representation of the Empire's cults.[11] Traditionally Corinth had been a centre for the worship of Aphrodite, and

---

even if rank could not. The evidence from Corinth is that status mattered very much to the people who had recently acquired it. See E.A. Judge, *Rank and Status in the World of the Caesars and St. Paul* (Christ Church: University of Canterbury, 1982).

[7] Thiselton, *1 Corinthians*, 13.

[8] Witherington, *Conflict and Community in Corinth*, 20.

[9] For example the Babbius monument in which the chief magistrate recorded his own gift to the city. See Thiselton, *1 Corinthians*, 8. For further characteristics of secular leadership in Corinth see Andrew D. Clarke, *Secular and Christian Leadership in Corinth: A Socio-Historical and Exegetical Study of 1 Corinthians 1-6*, Arbeiten zur Geschichte des antiken Judentums and des Urchristentums; Bd. 18 (Leiden: Brill, 1993), 9-40.

[10] Savage, *Power through Weakness*, 44-45; Winter, *After Paul Left Corinth*, 276-278.

[11] Savage, *Power through Weakness*, 49.

this continued during the time of Roman Corinth.[12] For this and other reasons it was likely that a high level of sexual activity took place within the precincts of the city.[13] Quite naturally, the imperial cult found a popular following within the new Roman city of Corinth.[14] More generally, there is every indication that the religious life in Corinth mirrored that elsewhere in the Roman Empire, where people valued demonstrations of power and impressive preaching. The cults dominated all aspects of daily life in first century Corinth. Savage concludes, 'People looked to the cults not for a sacred perspective in a secular world, nor even for a retreat from the present world, but for the nucleus of their world – the social, cultural, commercial, political, athletic and medical verities so vital for daily existence. They expected the cults to apply a transcendental stamp of approval to their lives.'[15]

The picture which emerges is thus of a city which was in many ways similar to other successful cities throughout the Roman Empire. As Savage notes, the difference lies in the emphasis: because of the factors outlined above, Corinth was a city where social mobility was more pronounced, where status anxiety was more problematic, where self-display was more prevalent because recognition mattered more, and where social competition was more fierce.[16] It was a confident, thriving Corinth that Paul would have got to know on his visits, and it was into that context of success and pleasure that Paul preached the gospel and planted the church.

3.2.2. Rhetoric

This study has already commented on the significant role played by rhetoric in the ancient world, and hinted at some of the developments which took place in public speaking during the first century AD. It is inaccurate to imagine that the term

---

[12] Witherington, *Conflict and Community in Corinth*, 12-13; Thiselton, *1 Corinthians*, 10-11.
[13] Barnett, *2 Corinthians*, 4.
[14] Witherington, *Conflict and Community in Corinth*, 18.
[15] Savage, *Power through Weakness*, 51.
[16] Ibid., 52.

rhetoric describes a static phenomenon that was consistently displayed throughout time and space; it is rather the case that the practice of rhetoric changed over time, and these changes were seen in particular places. It is the nature of this change, and the role played by the city of Corinth in these developments, that is so illuminating for the present aim of understanding the communicative context in which Paul was speaking.

In a thorough historical study of rhetoric Duane Litfin describes the background to 1 Corinthians 1-4 by surveying the development of rhetoric from its classical inception around 500 BC to its expression in the first century context.[17] Drawing on the work of Plato, Isocrates and Aristotle, Litfin identifies four recurring themes in their treatment of rhetoric: persuasion as the goal of rhetoric, the intimate association between eloquence and power, adaptation as the genius of rhetoric (by which is meant the ability to understand and then adapt one's message to the audience), and eloquence as an avenue to honour, wealth, position and influence.[18] These themes find echoes in the later practice of Cicero and Quintilian, and are defined by Litfin, drawing on the work of G.A. Kennedy, as 'primary' or 'functional' rhetoric, whereby the rhetoric is merely a tool for the orator to persuade an audience of the soundness of a certain point of view.[19] However, Litfin goes on to argue that the first century saw a rise in a style he defines as 'secondary' or 'decorative' rhetoric, whereby, instead of addressing a particular topic or theme, orators began speaking for speaking's sake.[20] The aim of such rhetoric had moved from persuading the audience of the veracity of a certain point of view to making them impressed with the orator's own skill. Describing this phenomenon using the terms 'classical' and 'instrumental', Stephen Pogoloff argues that with this trend the

---

[17] Litfin, *Paul's Theology of Proclamation*, 21-132.

[18] Ibid., 64-66.

[19] Ibid., 33f.

[20] Ibid., 110-137. There is no suggestion that this was an entirely new style. The original wave of sophists exhibited similar characteristics in ca. 500 BC. However, Litfin does argue (with Pogoloff) that in the first century this movement began to find new momentum.

Aristotelian focus on truth and rationality had shifted to a concern for applause and success.[21] In this context the orators began to disregard content and simply say what the audience wanted to hear; the skill of eloquence was prized more than ever, rhetorical practice at the same time more listened to and also more criticised. Rarely had the audience had more power to judge the speaker; comparing and contrasting speakers became a favourite pastime.[22]

Yet even if this rhetorical trend was true throughout the Greco-Roman world in the first century, it still remains to be shown that it was an issue for the city of Corinth. Litfin argues largely from silence, maintaining that in the absence of evidence to the contrary, we should assume a similar trend in Corinth as elsewhere.[23] Yet there is evidence that Corinth was more exposed than most cities to this new form of rhetoric. Bruce Winter makes a detailed and strong case for the existence in Corinth of a sophistic movement commonly thought only to flower with the so-called 'Second Sophistic' in the second and third centuries, a movement which closely mirrors the 'secondary' rhetoric Litfin and Pogoloff describe.[24] Drawing on the work of the sophists in Corinth, as well as their detractors, Winter argues that the level of public following they received, together with their success in attracting students to train under them, must indicate the significance of the sophist in Corinthian society.[25] The characteristics of this movement seem to have been the high profile of the individual speaker and his desire to recruit disciples, the importance of acquiring an enthusiastic response from the audience, and the

---

[21] S.M. Pogoloff, *Logos and Sophia: The Rhetorical Situation of 1 Corinthians*, Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series 134 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992).

[22] Litfin, *Paul's Theology of Proclamation*, 130. Litfin does not argue that 'primary' rhetoric disappeared, or that audiences would necessarily have been able to tell the difference between the two, but does maintain that the landscape of rhetorical practice in the Greco-Roman world of the first century had fundamentally changed.

[23] Ibid., 143, although there is a brief reference to the Favorinus statue discussed below.

[24] Winter, *Philo and Paul*, 113-244.

[25] Ibid., 144; Bullmore, *Paul's Theology of Rhetorical Style*, 151 notes the important shift in focus from political oratory to that taught and undertaken in schools.

concomitant tendency of the Corinthian public to be fickle in their loyalty and admiration.[26] The rhetorical technique of the sophists was lamented by classical rhetoricians such as Dio of Prusa, but the public was clearly in their sway, revelling not least in the audience's ability to raise a speaker up, as well as cast him down.[27]

It seems, therefore, that the communicative environment in Corinth was particularly complex. Not only was the city part of an Empire where rhetoric was increasingly more about impressing – rather than persuading – the audience, about applause rather than truth, but also Corinth was itself home to a number of sophistic speakers whose aim was to win admiration, a following and financial success for themselves.[28] Anthony Thiselton suggests that this 'competitive rhetoric' is one of the correlations between Corinth and the present day.[29] Indeed, in a speech at the National Evangelical Anglican Congress in 2003 Thiselton went further still, commenting that 'rhetoric in Corinth is what we now call spin.'[30] Certainly there are some similarities between the sophists of the first century and the spin-doctors of today. The sophists can be seen as betraying the four marks of spin mentioned in chapter one: a concern to please the audience, a desire to create and protect reputation, a priority given to presentation over content, and a lack of commitment to truth-telling. Of course, there are important differences as well, not least in the different roles played within the political culture of the day, but the similarities are striking. If Paul was facing a context in which priority was given to form over content, and where reputation and audience approval counted for so much, he was communicating in an environment not dissimilar to today's Christian

---

[26] An example of the latter tendency was the experience of the sophist Favorinus. After being highly honoured in Corinth after two initial visits, he discovers on arriving a third time that the statue which had been erected in the library had been taken down; he complains that he is no longer as popular as he was. See Winter, *Philo and Paul*, 132-136

[27] Ibid., 126-132.

[28] Ibid., 144.

[29] Thiselton, *1 Corinthians*, 14.

[30] In a speech entitled 'The Cross: Power and Weakness' given at the Winter Gardens, Blackpool on 20 September 2003.

communicators. There is thus more reason to trace the theological decisions he makes with regard to news.

3.2.3. Church

The story of the church in Corinth has proved a favourite area for scholarly debate. While it is clear that the church in that city had its problems, it is a far from straightforward task to clarify what these problems actually involved. This study will not aim to cover this wide area of scholarship, but some comment does need to be made about the relationship of Paul to the church in Corinth, because the nature of that relationship is a likely factor in Paul's communicative strategy.

The initial stages of Paul's involvement with Corinth can be briefly narrated. According to the account in Acts Paul went to Corinth on his second missionary journey, having previously visited Athens (Acts 18:1). He stayed with Aquila and his wife Priscilla, carried on working as a tentmaker, and preached both in the synagogue and elsewhere, establishing the nascent Christian community in the city (Acts 18:2-11). Paul stayed eighteen months, and went on to visit the city on at least two more occasions.[31] Yet it is the nature of the evolving relationship, particularly as implied by the two extant Corinthian letters, that is the subject of such fierce debate. Both letters betray a level of tension in Paul's relationship with the Corinthian believers (and 2 Corinthians especially so).[32] Scholarly debate has largely focussed around the external factors which had affected the church in Corinth and in turn their relations with Paul;[33] thus much is made of the

---

[31] For more on the dates of Paul's visits and letters to Corinth, see Martin, *2 Corinthians*, xlvi.

[32] For example concerning divisions in the church (1 Cor 1:10-16), the nature of apostolic ministry (1 Cor 9:1-3), Paul's travel plans (2 Cor 1:15-2:4), his previous correspondence (2 Cor 2:4-10) and present ministry (2 Cor 10-13).

[33] For a long time it was argued that Gnostic influences were behind the issues in 1 Corinthians, although this view is no longer widely held. See discussions in Thiselton, *1 Corinthians*, 235 and Winter, *Philo and Paul*, 236-7. With respect to 2 Corinthians the debate focuses around the identity of the 'super-apostles' mentioned in 2 Corinthians 11:5. See Margaret E Thrall, "Super-Apostles, Servants of Christ and Servants of Satan," *Journal for the*

discontinuity in context between 1 and 2 Corinthians, with particular focus given to what went wrong between the writing of the first and second letter.[34]

Yet a number of recent studies have suggested that the problems in the Corinthian church (and thus the tensions with Paul) arose principally not from external factors but from internal factors; Bruce W. Winter argues with respect to 1 Corinthians that Paul was 'responding to problems which were created by the influence of secular ethics or social conventions on this nascent Christian community.'[35] Timothy Savage makes a case with respect to 2 Corinthians that the prime area of tension arose not from Paul's rivals (i.e. Apollos in 1 Corinthians and the 'super-apostles' in 2 Corinthians), but rather from the community itself and its adoption of a secular world view.[36] This perspective opens up the possibility for a level of continuity between 1 and 2 Corinthians; it is not to deny the particular occasion of each epistle but rather to suggest that at root the Corinthian problem was that of adopting the secular values – as Winter translates 1 Corinthians 3:3 'walking in a secular way.'[37]

It is impossible to be definite about this reading, but it does leave open the suggestion that the critique of Paul as disclosed in 2 Corinthians is not just a reflection of the particular tensions at that time but was true of a deeper relational

---

Study of the New Testament 6 (1986) for a discussion of this, and Barnett, *2 Corinthians*, 33-40 for a helpful summary of this complex debate.

[34] For example Barnett devotes relatively little space to problems that continued from 1 Corinthians and much more space to the new problems. Barnett, *2 Corinthians*, 27-50. In referring to two letters I do recognise that there may have been up to four letters written by Paul to the church in Corinth.

[35] Winter, *After Paul Left Corinth*, 4. Winter's argument is strengthened by a detailed examination of the available archaeological and literary evidence behind the influences and changes within first-century Corinth. Such an approach has considerable potential; see also Clarke, *Secular and Christian Leadership in Corinth*, 59-106.

[36] Savage, *Power through Weakness*, 10-11.

[37] Winter, *After Paul Left Corinth*, 4. Litfin also sets out a coherent picture in which the Corinthian believers had embraced the Christian gospel and yet had been drawn back by the 'age-old cultural appeal of *paideia*.' Litfin, *Paul's Theology of Proclamation*, 170.

strain between the apostle and the church in Corinth.[38] Savage identifies four specific areas in which the Corinthians find fault with Paul: his refusal to boast (clearly implied in Paul's ironic boasting of 2 Cor 11:16-21; see also 2 Cor 10:12-18) his physical presence (which is weak and unimpressive – 2 Cor 10:10), his speech (which was not of the level expected of public speakers – cf.2 Cor 10:10; 11:6), and his refusal to accept financial support (which makes the Corinthian church inferior to other churches – see 2 Cor 11:7-10 and 12:16).[39] Paul was not the apostle whom the church in Corinth expected, or thought they deserved; his behaviour and skills were significantly deficient according to the model of ministry they were using, a model heavily influenced by secular models of leadership and public speaking.[40] Winter marshals the above texts and others to argue that Paul's ministry was being critiqued according to the canons of the sophistic movement, whereby the sophist was to think highly of himself, be attractive in demeanour, speak fluently and well, and undertake public benefactions.[41] That Paul would do none of this was the underlying source of tension between himself and the church.[42]

The problems and tensions in the Corinthian church were manifold, complex and no doubt constantly shifting; they concerned the church members' relationships with each other, their leaders and their founder, the apostle Paul. Nevertheless, this

---

[38] David R. Hall argues that if 1 Corinthians is read in the light of 2 Corinthians a number of the issues from the latter letter may be seen in embryonic form. Yet he still believes that these problems are the result of teachers coming to visit the church and introducing new ideas. David R. Hall, *The Unity of the Corinthian Correspondence*, Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series; 251 (London: T&T Clark International, 2003).

[39] Savage, *Power through Weakness*, 54-99.

[40] See Clarke, *Secular and Christian Leadership in Corinth*, 89-106.

[41] Winter, *Philo and Paul*, 177. The important point here is that Winter demonstrates not only the presence in Corinth of sophistic teachers but also their influence on the church. He argues that the existence of a sophistic movement is evidence of continuity between the two extant Corinthian letters. See Winter, *Philo and Paul*, 237.

[42] See also Litfin, *Paul's Theology of Proclamation*, 160-173, who argues that the main area of tension between Paul and the church in Corinth was Paul's deficiency in public speaking. This was undoubtedly a significant problem but it was also a symptom of a wider area of strain between the apostle and the community. Also see Thiselton, *1 Corinthians*, 33 and 40 for a summary of the argument that the Corinthians held a different value system to Paul.

study will assume that a significant source of tension between Paul and the Christian community in Corinth flowed not from the visits by other teachers but rather from the adoption by the Corinthians of the value system of the city in which they lived.[43] Since rhetorical excellence played such a significant part in Corinthian life, it is easy to understand why Paul's communication was a source of much debate within a church which was measuring ministry according to its own secular canons.

3.2.4. Summary

This survey of the Corinthian context has enabled us to appreciate the size of the task that faced Paul as he communicated with the church in Corinth. He found himself speaking and writing to a church located in one of the most dynamic cities in the ancient world, confident and full of upwardly-mobile people. Moreover, he was communicating in a climate of competitive rhetoric where, for a lot of speakers, the formerly-held goals of persuasion and truth had been replaced by that of winning admiration and applause. Finally, he was speaking to a community of believers who showed themselves still to be holding to a secular value system, and were critiquing his own ministry according to this canon.

3.3. 1 Corinthians 2:1-5

> [1]When I came to you, brothers and sisters, I did not come proclaiming the mystery of God in lofty words or wisdom. [2]For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and him crucified. [3]And I came to you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling. [4]My speech and my proclamation were not with plausible words of wisdom, but with a demonstration of the Spirit and of power, [5]so that your faith might rest not on human wisdom but on the power of God.

---

[43] Thiselton, *1 Corinthians*, 33.

3.3.1. Introduction

For the purposes of this study 1 Corinthians 2:1-5 represents a critical passage with which to engage. The overall aim of this chapter is to analyse both the communicative context in which Paul's hardship narratives were written, shared and received, and also the way the apostle understood his own task as a communicator. In the light of the latter aim, these verses represent Paul's most extended reflection on the nature of his own preaching in the Corinthian church.[44] As a passage it has attracted a significant body of scholarly comment, partly at least because it is recognised that Paul's argument does not just refer to his initial preaching in Corinth, but also indicates how Paul understands his ongoing task of communicating in a context of 'competitive rhetoric.'[45] I agree with this emerging consensus; it seems to me that in these verses Paul is doing more than simply reminding his audience of his initial preaching in Corinth. Set in the context of the first four chapters of the epistle – which take the form, in part at least, of an *apologia* by Paul of his own apostolic ministry – this passage can be understood as a form of communicative manifesto for Paul's ongoing communication with the Corinthian church.[46] By defending his *modus operandi* at the birth of the Christian community in Corinth, Paul seems also to have one eye on his present practice of speaking and writing.

---

[44] Other references to Paul's communication are shorter and often related to particular criticisms that Paul is addressing. See 1 Corinthians 4:1-2; 9:16; 2 Corinthians 4:2; 10:10; 11:6. See Bullmore, *Paul's Theology of Rhetorical Style*, 4.

[45] Timothy Lim, "Not in Persuasive Words of Wisdom, but in the Demonstration of the Spirit and Power," *Novum Testamentum* 29, no. 2 (1987); Bullmore, *Paul's Theology of Rhetorical Style*; Pogoloff, *Logos and Sophia*, 98-128; Winter, *Philo and Paul*, 147-161; Litfin, *Paul's Theology of Proclamation*, 204-212.

[46] Certainly the issues raised by these verses receive expression elsewhere. Thiselton draws attention to the parallels between 2:1-5 and other areas of the Pauline corpus, especially with regard to Paul's own weakness; see 2 Corinthians 10:10; Galatians 4:14; 1 Thessalonians 1:5-6. Thiselton, *1 Corinthians*, 204-205. After detailed discussion Litfin argues that 2:1-5 should be properly seen as a key part of Paul's overall theological argument. Litfin, *Paul's Theology of Proclamation*, 252.

However, the nature of this manifesto requires some detailed analysis. It is immediately apparent that Paul is rejecting one form of communication and replacing it with another, but it is important to understand what these models involve. Moreover, a key question to ask is *why* Paul makes these communicative choices, and what implications this might have for understanding Paul's relationship to the exercise of rhetorical skill in preaching and writing, together with a more general understanding of the framework for Paul's communication. I will examine, therefore, what exactly Paul is rejecting in verses 1 and 4a, before looking at what he regards as the core elements of his own preaching. I will then explore the theological reasons behind these choices before making some general conclusions about Paul's aims with regard to communication in and to Corinth.

3.3.2. 'not with plausible words of wisdom': rhetoric renounced? (vv1, 4a)

What form of communication is Paul rejecting in these verses? That he is setting up a distinction is implied from the use of the ellipse *kagō*, which may be rendered 'as for me'; Paul's portrayal of himself in these verses will be both of a different order to that which the Corinthians were perhaps used to and distinctive to the practice of others.[47] The heart of this distinction is to be found in verse 1 and verse 4. Here Paul claims not to have come proclaiming in 'lofty words or wisdom' (*'logou ē sofias'*) (v1) or 'plausible words of wisdom' (*'peithois sofias logois'*) (v4).[48] It has been argued that in these phrases Paul is eschewing any recourse to rhetorical techniques

---

[47] Bruce Winter argues that the emphasis on *elthōn* and *ēlthon* and the use of *kata* suggests that Paul is consciously contrasting the manner of his arrival in Corinth with that of the sophistic speakers. Their arrival in a city followed certain conventions, often involving a public introduction in which the sophist would deliver an encomium to the city. In reality, this display represented the speaker being on trial; failure was common and humiliating, but success meant enhanced reputation and significant pecuniary gain. In his narration of how he arrived in Corinth, Paul is setting himself apart from this usual practice. Winter, *Philo and Paul*, 149-157.

[48] To these two verses can be added 1:17, where Paul claims to have preached the gospel 'not with eloquent wisdom' (*'ouk en sofia logou'*).

in his preaching.[49] However, careful attention to the meaning of *logos* and *sofia* in their Corinthian context has led others to suggest a more nuanced interpretation.[50] Given the likely presence in Corinth of speakers from a sophistic background it seems probable that Paul is referring not to all forms of rhetoric but instead to the 'secondary' rhetoric which was growing in popularity and which focussed on winning audience approval through stylistic virtuosity.[51] In a detailed analysis of the vocabulary of this passage, Bruce Winter argues that Paul is deliberately adopting an anti-sophistic stance, rejecting that form of speaking which prized recognition and success;[52] he concludes, 'Paul has no interest in winning adulation for himself.'[53]

Thiselton's rendering of the two key phrases as 'high-sounding rhetoric or a display of cleverness' and 'enticing clever words' is thus extremely helpful.[54] Given what is known of the Corinthian communicative environment, it seems clear that Paul is rejecting the clever form of speech associated with the sophistic teachers of Corinth. He is renouncing communication which aims to impress, to flatter or win applause, and declares himself unwilling to speak according to the canons of competitive

---

[49] An example is George A. Kennedy, *Classical Rhetoric and Its Christian and Secular Tradition from Ancient to Modern Times* (Chapel Hill, NC.: University of North Carolina Press, 1980), 131-132. Also Dale B. Martin, *The Corinthian Body* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1995), 55-67.

[50] Timothy Lim first suggested that a sociological interpretation of 2:1-5 (that is, one that takes seriously the sophistic context of the Corinthians) might help clarify what Paul is rejecting and what he is not. Lim, "Not in Persuasive Words," esp. 148-149. Stephen Pogoloff has explored the meaning of these two words in most detail and his argument remains convincing. Pogoloff, *Logos and Sophia*, esp. 98-128. See also Bullmore, *Paul's Theology of Rhetorical Style*, 224-231.

[51] Litfin, *Paul's Theology of Proclamation*, 261-262; Lim, "Not in Persuasive Words," 148.

[52] Winter, *Philo und Paul*, 155-161.

[53] Ibid., 157.

[54] Thiselton, *1 Corinthians*, 204. It is not entirely clear whether the word translated 'enticing' is being used by Paul negatively or not (as Thiselton's translation might suggest). After a detailed study of its usage in contemporary literature Wolfgang Schrage suggests it could be taken positively, neutrally or negatively; nevertheless, it is clear that even if it was a description of an acceptable form of rhetoric, Paul wants nothing to do with it. See Schrage, *Der erste Brief*, 232-233.

rhetoric which were current not only in the city of Corinth, but also the church which had adopted a secular value system. Thus these verses represent not a blanket rejection of all forms of rhetorical technique but rather a refusal to communicate with the Corinthians on their own terms.[55] Paul wants to speak differently.

3.3.3. Human Weakness and Divine Power: Authentic Communication (vv2-3, 4b-5)

Paul's argument, however, is not simply negative; as well as describing the form of preaching he seeks to avoid, he also describes three key aspects of his communicative strategy, which are best understood in the light of the prevailing sophistic practice. First, Paul is clear about the priority given to the content of his message. The aorist *ekrina* ('I resolved') in v2 indicates how the content of Paul's preaching – 'Jesus Christ and him crucified' – was of central importance to his speaking.[56] To the practitioners of secondary rhetoric the subject mattered little; for Paul the topic of his preaching was everything.[57] He did not start with what the audience wanted to hear but with the heart of the gospel as he understood it. This is not to suggest that Paul spoke about nothing else, but it does underline the importance of the crucified Jesus in his proclamation of the gospel. As Thiselton comments, 'Whether or not he spoke of anything else would be incidental; *to proclaim the risen Christ, and Christ alone, remains his settled policy.*'[58]

---

[55] Schrage, *Der erste Brief*, 233-235.

[56] Ibid., 229.

[57] Litfin contrasts Paul's concern for content with the prevailing equation in secondary rhetoric in which content was so presented and altered as to impress the audience and win their approval. He argues that for Paul 'the message was not the manipulated variable by which the equation was made to work; instead it was a sturdy, unchanging, constant – Christ crucified, simply proclaimed.' Litfin, *Paul's Theology of Proclamation*, 208. In the conclusion to his study Litfin suggests that in this emphasis on content is found a significant point of contrast between Paul's view of preaching and the essence of Greco-Roman rhetoric. Litfin, *Paul's Theology of Proclamation*, 244-249.

[58] Thiselton, *1 Corinthians*, 211 (italics his). Also Schrage, *Der erste Brief*, 228-229.

A further aspect of Paul's model of communication is his own behaviour as he preached the unchanging heart of the gospel. Verse 3 describes how Paul himself felt as he arrived and spoke in Corinth 'in weakness and in fear and in much trembling'. These words conjure up a vivid picture of a nervous Paul speaking in the synagogue, and they clearly function on various levels. They may refer to a physical illness under which Paul was labouring; they may also refer to the sense of responsibility Paul had as steward of God's message.[59] What is more certain is that they refer to Paul's rejection of the range of rhetorical skills which can be guaranteed to impress an audience, and thus lead to self-confidence. Paul is describing his behaviour as a weak, fearful, trembling preacher in direct contrast to the confident self-promotion of the sophistic rhetoricians he knew about.[60] Paul's communication was not about himself; indeed, he recognises that he was an unimpressive figure, unlikely to meet with the approval of the discriminating Corinthian audience.

The final aspect of Paul's model of communication in Corinth is his determination to leave to God the task of persuading and convincing people of the message. Rejecting speaking 'with plausible words of wisdom' Paul claims that he spoke 'with a demonstration of the Spirit's power' (v4). Scholars have highlighted how this contrast points to the deeper distinction in Paul's communicative strategy; whereas the sophistic rhetoricians sought to persuade the audience and win the argument at any cost, Paul expects the proof to come not from his own rhetorical skill but from an open statement of the truth, reinforced by the work of the Holy Spirit.[61] As a communicator he thus steps into the background, letting the message have its impact and believing that God's Spirit will be at work as this happens.[62]

---

[59] See a full discussion on the possible meanings in Thiselton, *1 Corinthians*, 213-215; also Litfin, *Paul's Theology of Proclamation*, 208.

[60] Winter, *Philo and Paul*, 158.

[61] Pogoloff argues that Paul here betrays a level of continuity with the 'classical' Platonic-Aristotelian tradition which understood rhetorical practice as being a logical demonstration of truth; it was from this tradition that the practitioners of 'instrumental' rhetoric had

In reflecting on the communicative choices he made when he came to Corinth, Paul has painted a clear picture of his priorities in preaching the Christian gospel. He decisively rejects the clever rhetoric of contemporary Corinth, focussed on the activity of the sophistic movement, while at the same time not renouncing the wider area of rhetorical skill and concern for truth. In its place Paul affirms the priority of content in communication, and defines this content as centred around the crucified Christ; he also betrays a lack of concern for his own reputation and image, and a clear determination that any faith and conviction that arises from his message should come not from his own words or rhetorical skill but the powerful work of the Holy Spirit.

3.3.4. Behind the Choices: The Cross of Christ

A critical question, however, remains to be addressed. Why is it that Paul formulates his communicative strategy in the terms he does? It was once fashionable to suggest that Paul's approach in Corinth arose from his disappointing experience preaching in Athens (Acts 17:16-33). The argument runs that Paul was frustrated at the small number of converts in Athens (v34) and so rethought his approach to preaching for his next stop in Corinth, cutting out all aspects of his speaking except Jesus and his crucifixion.[63] Moreover, he recognised that he had deficiencies as a public speaker and so decided to be open about them. There are a number of problems with this argument,[64] but a key area of weakness is its failure to

---

strayed. Pogoloff, *Logos and Sophia*, 138. Winter also discusses the technical meaning of *apodeixeis* and Paul's deliberate use of it in his argument. Winter, *Philo and Paul*, 154-155, 159.

[62] See Thiselton, *1 Corinthians*, 220-223 for a discussion of the precise meaning of *pneumatos kai dunameōs*. Thiselton suggests the translation 'brought home powerfully by the Spirit' to indicate the work of the Holy Spirit in witnessing to Christ and the effectiveness of the gospel.

[63] Thiselton rehearses and critiques this argument. Ibid., 212. See also Schrage, *Der erste Brief*, 229.

[64] There is no evidence from the Acts narrative that Paul was disillusioned after his experience in Athens; the division caused by his preaching (v32) should not obscure the fact that a number of people became believers (v34).

recognise that for Paul the cross of Christ was not a reduced version of the Christian gospel, compressed just for the Corinthian context, but rather the heart of his apostolic preaching.[65] If this is understood, and if proper regard is given to the immediate context of these verses, it can be seen briefly how the cross lies behind each of the communicative choices Paul makes.

First, Paul's determination to prioritise the content, that is, the preaching of the crucified Christ, rests on the fundamental position that the cross occupies in his thought. The first five verses of chapter two come at the end of a section in Paul's argument where he focuses on the powerful nature of the 'message about the cross' (1 Cor 1:18-31). He recognises that the story of a crucified Messiah is a 'stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles' and yet he insists 'we proclaim Christ crucified' (1:18). The reason for this ongoing preaching of the cross, in the face of an audience reception which is far from positive, is Paul's confidence that in the apparent foolishness and weakness of the cross is to be found the 'power of God and wisdom of God' (vv24-25). For Paul, therefore, the message of the cross forms a content to his preaching that is not negotiable; if it had been, he may have changed it to suit his audience better. 1 Corinthians 1:18-2:5 has, of course, more to reveal than this, but it does confirm that in the context of the Corinthian correspondence the heart of Paul's communicative strategy is the cross of Jesus Christ.

Second, the cross forms not only the content of Paul's preaching but also influences the manner of his communication.[66] Commenting on these verses Thiselton notes that 'in Paul's theology the cross is more than (but not less than) a remedy and atonement for past sins. It provides the basis for Christian identity and his

---

[65] Schrage draws attention to Galatians 3:1 which predates the Athens experience. Schrage, *Der erste Brief*, 229. See also Galatians 6:14.

[66] Schrage comments clearly that the cross also determines Paul's behaviour as a herald of the gospel. Ibid.

transformative power to reshape Christian existence in the present and the future.'[67] Part of this transformation is on display in Paul's behaviour as a communicator; reflecting on the crucified Messiah has shown Paul the principle that God works through apparent weakness (1:25). This has implications not only for an understanding of the church (1:26-31), but also the ministry of the apostle himself; instead of pursuing an image of success and achievement as was sought by the sophistic speakers, Paul conforms to a totally different model of being, living and communicating.[68] Weakness for Paul is thus not something of which to be embarrassed; rather it can reinforce the message of the crucified Messiah and thus become the place in which God's power is seen. Schrage is thus right to note that weakness of the preacher corresponds with the weakness of the crucified Christ himself.[69]

Finally, the cross sets the pattern for Paul's presentation of the message. Paul rejects persuasive words and rhetorical brilliance because to engage in such an approach would be to undermine the nature of the gospel being preached. If the message Paul is proclaiming is about apparent foolishness, he cannot bring himself to dress it up in fine-sounding rhetorical flourishes, for to do so would be to distract from the message itself and thus subvert its transformative power even as it is being preached. Likewise, Litfin comments that Paul's *modus operandi* as a preacher 'was not only justified by, but in fact demanded by, a fundamental principle of God's dealings with the world.'[70] Furthermore, Paul believes that the message of the cross has a power of its own to transform those who hear it; his task is to herald it

---

[67] Thiselton, *1 Corinthians*, 147.

[68] This dual influence of the cross, that is, on both the church and apostle, is highlighted best by Schrage who entitles this section 'The 'Word of the Cross' as Ground and Criterion of the Community and the Apostle'. Schrage, *Der erste Brief*, 165.

[69] Ibid., 231.

[70] Litfin, *Paul's Theology of Proclamation*, 193-194.

faithfully and not use rhetorical techniques which can get in the way.[71] As Winter comments, Paul 'refused to anchor the confidence of the Corinthian converts in the persuasiveness of rhetorical argumentation; therefore he adopted an anti-sophistic posture to eliminate any confusion of his message with that of the sophists.'[72]

In short, the evidence from 1 Corinthians 2:1-5 suggests that Paul's communicative method was based on his theological message. Paul eschewed sophistic invention not because he just did not like it, or thought it would not work, but because it ran directly contrary to the gospel of Jesus Christ he was proclaiming.[73] The message of the crucified Christ carried with it a necessary renunciation of rhetorical skill which was so popular in Corinth; the gospel of the crucified Jesus was not to be preached with clever and enticing rhetoric designed to impress and create an impact on the audience. Instead the substance of the message demanded that the content itself be clear, the manner of preaching be one of personal weakness, and the impact left confidently to the powerful work of God's Spirit. Litfin is correct when he concludes, 'his [i.e., Paul's] was an approach that was in conscious contrast to the persuasive orators of his day, *for theological reasons*'.[74]

3.3.5. 1 Corinthians 2:1-5 and Pauline Communication

It is now possible to assess what these verses might contribute to an understanding of Paul's general approach to communication. To do so will involve recognising that Paul's reason for reminding his Corinthian readers of his original communicative strategy is not to reminisce with them over happier days in the past but to affirm that his Christological approach to preaching and writing remains the

---

[71] Ibid., 208. Also Schrage, *Der erste Brief*, 225 'One cannot speak of the Crucified One with sparkling rhetorical elegance, not only for reasons of taste, but also because concentration is to be focussed on the message preached and not the preacher.'

[72] Winter, *Philo and Paul*, 161, also 187.

[73] Bullmore, *Paul's Theology of Rhetorical Style*, 222; Thiselton, *1 Corinthians*, 22.

[74] Litfin, *Paul's Theology of Proclamation*, 171 (italics mine). See also Bullmore who notes that 1 Corinthians 2:1-5 is both opened and closed with a reference to the 'integration of form and matter'. Bullmore, *Paul's Theology of Rhetorical Style*, 221.

same, because of his ongoing commitment to the cross of Christ (1 Cor 1:18-25). If such a step is taken, two points of more general relevance may be made, concerning Paul's own relationship to rhetorical theory and method and an overall theological framework for his communication.

What was Paul's approach to rhetoric? It has been claimed that these verses betray a Paul unsure of his own communicative model, because at the same time as forcefully rejecting rhetoric he employs aspects of it in his argument.[75] Reference is made to the sophisticated use of irony and rhetorical structure in the arguments elsewhere in the Corinthian letters, and the conclusion drawn that either Paul was being disingenuous in claiming to avoid all rhetoric, or that, try as he might, he could not avoid the rhetorical techniques that were all around him.[76] Some seek to explain this tension by arguing that Paul sought to avoid rhetoric in his preaching of the gospel, but was happy to employ it in his writing.[77] Yet if my reading of 1 Corinthians 2:1-5 is correct, Paul is not claiming to reject all forms of rhetoric at all, but rather the sophistic conventions represented so fully in the city of Corinth; to use Litfin's terms, he is renouncing 'secondary' rhetoric but not the classical tradition of 'primary' rhetoric.[78] Put in more pastoral terms, Paul is rejecting the role of the professional rhetorician who makes a living by speaking, winning admiration and thus teaching others to speak, and yet he is not thereby necessarily cutting himself off from the heritage of classical rhetoric.[79]

---

[75] Martin, *The Corinthian Body*, 67.

[76] See discussion in Bullmore, *Paul's Theology of Rhetorical Style*, 194-195. For a recent examination of these verses which suggest that Paul is actually using his own rhetorical techniques to re-establish his own authority in the Corinthian church see Charles A. Wanamaker, "A Rhetoric of Power: Ideology and 1 Corinthians 1-4," in *Paul and the Corinthians: Studies on a Community in Conflict: Essays in Honour of Margaret Thrall*, ed. Trevor J. Burke and J.K. Elliot (Leiden: Brill, 2003).

[77] See discussions in Litfin, *Paul's Theology of Proclamation*, 259-260 and Schrage, *Der erste Brief*, 225.

[78] See also Lim, "Not in Persuasive Words," 148-149.

[79] Winter, *Philo and Paul*, 239; Savage, *Power through Weakness*, 73.

All this is not to claim, however, that Paul consciously drew on rhetorical techniques in his preaching and writing. Scholars in the growing field of rhetorical criticism have sought to discover in Paul's letters evidence of the apostle using certain rhetorical structures and models, but the sheer diversity of the responses suggests the answer is far from clear.[80] It is reasonable to assume that as an intelligent man in the first century Paul would have been aware of the rhetorical techniques of his day; it seems likely that Paul received some training in rhetoric under Gamaliel and others.[81] It remains a challenge, however, to be certain about the extent to which Paul consciously adopted specific rhetorical models for his own communicative purposes; it is possible that he did, but the contemporary reader cannot be sure. This study of Paul's hardship lists will assume, therefore, that Paul was broadly familiar with the rhetorical canons of the day, but will not seek to make too close a correlation between any techniques used by Paul and those advocated by the rhetorical handbooks of the age.[82]

Greater certainty may be found in the second general observation, however, namely that these verses suggest that Paul places all his communicative choices, including any adoption of classical rhetorical models, under his overarching theological framework, namely the cross of Christ. 1 Corinthians 2:1-5 shows that it was theology, not a sense of rhetorical purity or practical expediency, that shaped his

---

[80] For such an approach to the Corinthian correspondence see Witherington, *Conflict and Community in Corinth* and Mitchell, *Paul and the Rhetoric of Reconciliation: An Exegetical Investigation of the Language and Composition of 1 Corinthians* . For a critique see Winter who concludes 'that Paul consciously structured the letter around the lines of an oration is uncertain; and those who think he did disagree on the details.' Winter, *Philo and Paul*, 201. See also Bullmore, *Paul's Theology of Rhetorical Style*, 194-195 and Thiselton's comment that the rhetorical analyses currently in vogue 'often oscillate between the obvious and the highly speculative.' Thiselton, *1 Corinthians*, 149.

[81] Witherington, *Paul Quest*, 89-97 explores in more detail the probable details of Paul's education. The scarcity of data makes firm conclusions unwise, but Witherington proceeds more carefully than many.

[82] Thus some highly contested areas in Pauline scholarship will be avoided, not least the relationship between epistolary and rhetorical conventions in Paul's *oeuvre*. For more on this debate see Stirewalt, *Paul, the Letter Writer*, 20.

decision to reject the sophistic conventions of Corinth; it was the cross of Christ that prompted the clarity of his message, his own personal weakness and the focus on God (instead of himself) as the one to convict and bring about faith. This is a point that is often missed; in making a general point on Paul's use of rhetoric Witherington notes simply what Paul was trying to avoid: 'Paul used all available ancient tools of persuasion to achieve his ends, being careful not to violate basic ethical commitments and his commitment to truth.'[83] Yet this last clause fails to appreciate that for Paul there is much more at stake than simply broad ethical commitments. The evidence from 1 Corinthians 2:1-5 at least is that he wants his communication, in its transparency, contrast and weakness, to model the gospel of the crucified Christ, and that all rhetorical choices are subsumed into this wider agenda.

The argument from 1 Corinthians 2:1-5 suggests that for Paul there is an inextricable link between message and method, a link that is closer than some have realised. Thiselton is correct when he argues that 'subject matter always takes priority over form'; it is certainly true that for Paul rhetoric is always subservient to his message.[84] However, it is possible to go still further; we saw in the previous section that for Paul subject matter not only takes priority over form, but also determines the form of communication. The 'weakness, fear and trembling' in which Paul came to Corinth, together with the eschewing of 'enticing clever words', were based on the message of 'Christ and him crucified'.[85] Schrage expresses this close relationship well; he argues that Paul's communicative theory was the result of a 'decision based on a fundamentally theological judgement, in which the content [of the preaching] determines also a level of brokenness (*Brechung*) and frustration (*Durchkreuzung*) in

---

[83] Witherington, *Paul Quest*, 126.

[84] Thiselton, *1 Corinthians*, 49.

[85] Bullmore calls this the 'integration of form and matter'. Bullmore, *Paul's Theology of Rhetorical Style*, 221.

the manner of its presentation.'[86] The shape of Paul's communicative method is determined by that of his message; for this reason I believe it is possible to speak of 1 Corinthians 2:1-5 as a manifesto for 'cruciform communication', that is, communication which is determined, in both form and content, by the cross of Christ. Such a description highlights the continuity in Paul's thought between the message he was communicating and the way he chose to share it; it also affirms the ongoing centrality of the cross in Paul's relationship with the Corinthian church.[87] It is my conclusion that in these verses we see Paul displaying a theologically coherent approach to communication based around the cross of Jesus Christ; moreover, because the apostle continues to preach the same gospel of the crucified Christ as he did when he arrived in Corinth, it can be reasonably assumed that the 'cruciform communication' which was his policy then remains his settled practice. What implications this has for his handling of news to the Corinthian Christians remains to be seen.

3.4. Conclusions

In this chapter I have suggested that an examination of the Corinthian context and 1 Corinthians 2:1-5 can shed considerable light on the formational side of Paul the speaker and writer, and thus on the production of the hardship narratives which are the focus of this study. Through a survey of cultural influences in ancient Corinth I argued that Paul was working in a very complex communicative environment, both because of the presence in confident Corinth of sophistic speakers and also because of the Corinthian Christians' tendency to critique Paul according to the secular conventions of their age. An analysis of 1 Corinthians 2:1-5, a key passage which I suggested could be read as Paul's communicative manifesto, demonstrated that Paul is determined to reject the prevailing models of communication which would win him applause and recognition, preferring to focus exclusively on his settled

---

[86] Schrage, *Der erste Brief*, 235. See also Lim, "Not in Persuasive Words," 149.

[87] See Thiselton's description of the cross as the unifying theme of 1 Corinthians. Thiselton, *1 Corinthians*, 33.

message of the cross of Christ, unafraid to show his own weakness and not attempting to convince the listener through rhetorical skill or sophistication. I argued that the passage does not imply that Paul rejected all forms of rhetorical technique, but rather the secondary rhetoric that was so popular in Corinth and was being practised by the sophistic teachers. Nevertheless, I concluded that these verses point towards a model of communication in which all communicative choices, including the use or otherwise of basic rhetorical structures, are placed in an overall theological framework based on the crucified Christ. The cross of Christ determines both the message and the method of Paul's preaching; I suggested that the phrase 'cruciform communication' is an appropriate summary of Paul's approach as described in these verses and can refer not only to Paul's communicative behaviour when he first preached to the Corinthians but also his ongoing understanding of preaching and writing to that early Christian community.

Such an analysis suggests a number of important questions for a study of the news which Paul handled most often in his Corinthian correspondence, that of his own hardship. In particular, it is necessary to consider whether there is any correlation between Paul's 'cruciform communication' as described in 1 Corinthians 2:1-5 and the model of news handling which Paul employs in sharing stories of his own suffering.[88] If the passage studied in this chapter is as formative for Paul's communication as I have suggested, then we should expect to see a level of continuity between it and the hardship lists scattered through the two Corinthian letters. In short, was Paul able to live out his communicative theory in practice?[89]

---

[88] In a wide-ranging examination of the theology of the cross in Paul's letters, Charles B. Cousar concludes that Paul's 'rhetoric and theology cohere'. Charles B. Cousar, *A Theology of the Cross: The Death of Jesus in the Pauline Letters* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 166. The question which my analysis of 1 Corinthians 2:1-5 poses is whether Paul's news and theology cohere.

[89] Litfin concludes his study of 1 Corinthians 1-4 with precisely this question, namely the relationship between Paul's theory and practice, as evidenced elsewhere in his letters. He suggests three possible options: first, that Paul's argument in 1 Corinthians 1-4 is simply an oratorical ploy designed to win the approval of the Corinthians, and was never meant to

What are the theological values that shape Paul's news handling to the Corinthian church? It is with an answer to these key questions that the next chapter will be concerned.

---

refer to his ongoing communicative practice; second, that Paul was inconsistent in that he tried to avoid using rhetoric but could not avoid using it totally; and third, that Paul used rhetorical techniques which were designed to attract the reader's attention but not detract from the message. Litfin favours the third option, but admits that further research needs to be done. This study aims in part to do this by assessing whether Paul's handling of news coheres with his communicative manifesto of 1 Corinthians 2:1-5. Litfin, *Paul's Theology of Proclamation*, 254-262.

4. TEXT: AN ANALYSIS OF THE CORINTHIAN HARDSHIP NARRATIVES AS EXAMPLES OF PAUL'S NEWS HANDLING

4.1. Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to analyse the texts under discussion and establish whether Paul's approach to news was consistent with his overall understanding of communication. To do this I will measure the category of news which Paul shared most in his correspondence with the Corinthian church, namely the narratives of his own hardship, against the cruciform model of communication described in 1 Corinthians 2:1-5. I will examine five passages in some detail, aiming to discover both the nature of the hardship that Paul reports as well as the way in which he narrates these experiences.[1] I will then go deeper and look at whether the motivation and method of this news handling cohere with 1 Corinthians 2:1-5; after critiquing scholarly approaches to this category of news I will assess whether these hardship narratives, in both their content and form, can be understood as practical examples of the cruciform communication which Paul declared to be his settled mode of speaking and writing to the Corinthian church.

4.2. The Hardship Narratives: Content and Form

The analysis of the Corinthian hardship narratives will focus on two main areas, the actual content of the news which Paul is sharing and the form in which he shares it. The reason for this approach is to be found in the previous analysis of 1 Corinthians 2:1-5; it was my conclusion that Paul argues for a coherence between the message of the gospel ('Christ and him crucified') and the manner in which it is preached ('in

---

[1] The five passages to be studied in detail are 1 Corinthians 4:9-13; 2 Corinthians 1:8-11; 4:7-12; 6:4-10; 11:23-33. 2 Corinthians 12:1-10 will not be studied in depth for reasons of space, but it will be referred to in the later analysis.

weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling'). Thus it will be important to identify an internal consistency in Paul's news handling (that is, between content and form) as well as an external consistency between Paul's sharing of stories about his own hardship and the cruciform model of communication expressed in 1 Corinthians 2:1-5.[2] Thus, after a brief introduction to its context, each passage will be explored both in terms of what the content of the news is and then the form this reportage takes, making particular reference to the rhetorical techniques which Paul employs. In terms of the earlier framework for news, focus will fall first on the 'event' and 'story' aspects of Paul's news, before turning to the nature of Paul's news as 'product'. The aim of this analysis is to gather the necessary data on which to base an assessment of whether the hardship narratives, in content and form, betray an approach to communication which is consistent with that outlined in 1 Corinthians 2:1-5.

4.2.1. 1 Corinthians 4:9-13

> [9]For I think that God has exhibited us apostles as last of all, as though sentenced to death, because we have become a spectacle to the world, to angels and mortals. [10]We are fools for the sake of Christ, but you are wise in Christ. We are weak but you are strong. You are held in honour, but we in disrepute. [11]To the present we are hungry and thirsty, we are poorly clothed and beaten and homeless, [12]and we grow weary from the work of our own hands. When reviled, we bless; when persecuted, we endure; [13]when slandered, we speak kindly. We have become like the rubbish of the world, the dregs of all things, to this very day.

This passage comes towards the end of the first main section of 1 Corinthians, four chapters which comprise not only Paul's defence of his own ministry among the Corinthians but also the apostle's critique of the Corinthians' own value system and

---

[2] It would not be sufficient to argue simply that Paul shares stories about himself which are consistent with the message of the cross without assessing how he does this. Were he to report this news in a way that emphasised his own power and strength it would seriously undermine the impact of the stories he was sharing, together with his integrity as a communicator.

assessment of ministry.[3] Two aspects of this critique are to be found in the immediate context of the verses under discussion. In vv1-5 Paul is arguing not only for his integrity as a steward of God's mysteries (vv1-2), but also against the Corinthians standing in judgement on his ministry (vv3-5).[4] In vv7-8 Paul is attempting to expose the premature triumphalism of the Corinthian believers, whose emphasis on the work of the Holy Spirit has neglected the ongoing realities of sin and struggle.[5] In this context *ēdē* ('already') speaks of an over-realized eschatology which fails to recognise the tensions which arise through living in a world of the 'not yet'.[6] This latter critique is framed in ironic terms as Paul mocks the supposed status of the Corinthian believers.[7] This first episode of hardship narrative thus takes place in a context of both *apologia* and critique, with an underlying tone of irony.

The hardship which Paul shares in vv9-13 has two broad aspects: the physical suffering which is an ongoing part of his ministry and the concomitant low social status Paul has an apostle. The heart of this passage is what is regarded as a

---

[3] See previous discussion in chapter 3 and Winter, *Philo and Paul*, 180-182.

[4] As continued to be their pattern with Paul. See 2 Corinthians 10:12-18 and Savage, *Power through Weakness*, 54-99.

[5] Schrage, *Der erste Brief*, 328.

[6] Whether the Corinthian problem was one of over-realized eschatology remains an area of critical debate. For an original outlining of this position see Anthony C. Thiselton, "Realized Eschatology at Corinth," *New Testament Studies* 24 (1978) and a critique by Richard B. Hays, "The Conversion of the Imagination: Scripture and Eschatology in 1 Corinthians," *New Testament Studies* 45 (1999). Yet while N.T. Wright suggests that Hays' argument, that the problem in Corinth was not too much eschatology but not enough, is now widely accepted (N.T Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, Christian Origins and the Question of God (London: SPCK, 2003), 279), the force of *ēdē* and the overall picture of the Corinthian church still suggest that they believed that many future blessings of the Christian life were available to them then. For a reshaped presentation of his 1978 argument see Thiselton, *1 Corinthians*, 39-41 and 358. Thiselton suggests that this theological misunderstanding was combined with secular influences on the Corinthian church. For confirmation of Thiselton's thesis of over-realized eschatology see C.K. Barrett, *A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 2nd ed. (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1971), 109 and Schrage, *Der erste Brief*, 338.

[7] Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1987), 171.

traditional hardship list (vv11-12a). Here Paul narrates the impact of ministry on his life, and probably has particularly in mind the impact of his decision not to receive patronage from the Corinthian church but instead to continue work as a tentmaker in order to support himself;[8] his shortage of food, drink, clothing, shelter and protection all describe his life at the margins of Corinthian society. This physical suffering is closely linked to his low social status. In a Corinthian context where rank and reputation counted for so much Paul uses imagery from a Roman gladiatorial procession to describe himself as being a 'spectacle to the world' (v9).[9] While the Corinthians are 'held in honour' Paul is 'in disrepute' (v10b); he is reviled and persecuted (v12). He describes himself as 'the rubbish of the world' and 'the dregs of all things' (v13). Paul wants to share with his readers how his distinctive and costly ministry as an apostle has led him to the very bottom of the social class system; by refusing to behave in the manner expected of visiting speakers, Paul has forfeited any hope of acquiring a good reputation in the city of Corinth. Moreover, he regards this situation as ongoing; the use of 'to the present hour' (v11a) and 'to this very day' (v13b) indicates that this news of physical suffering and poor reputation is not a one-off event but a situation which remains 'continuous and unabated'.[10]

A structural analysis reveals the careful and balanced way in which Paul constructs this report of his own sufferings.[11] Furthermore Paul employs a number of

---

[8] Research into the social, economic and physical conditions of tentmaking suggests that what he relates in these verses could refer directly to his experience in this trade. See discussion on the work of R.F. Hock in Thiselton, *1 Corinthians*, 363.

[9] According to this picture the Corinthians are the audience watching Paul 'exhibited' as a man condemned to die. See Schrage, *Der erste Brief*, 342 and Thiselton, *1 Corinthians*, 359-360.

[10] Thiselton, *1 Corinthians*, 362. Indeed, the fact that Paul does not refer to any specific examples of hardship or persecution is further evidence that the focus should be on this experience as an ongoing pattern of apostolic life.

[11] A picture (v9) is followed by three antitheses, then six verbs, three antitheses and a final picture. For an exceptionally thorough study of the rhetorical structure of the hardship lists see Markus Schiefer Ferrari, *Die Sprache des Leids in den paulinischen Peristasenkatalogen*, Stuttgarter Biblischer Beiträge 23 (Stuttgart: Verlag Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1991).

rhetorical tools in this passage: the bitter irony is continued from v8 into v10 as Paul mocks the status which the Corinthians believe themselves to have;[12] powerful imagery is used to frame this passage and reinforce the message of humiliation (vv9, 13);[13] two sets of three antitheses are used as Paul contrasts his own situation with that of the Corinthian church; finally, repetition is used in vv11-12a as Paul links six verbs together with the conjunction *kai*. This latter technique has the function of reinforcing the ongoing nature of Paul's hardship. It is with some justification that Schrage describes this passage as being 'full of rhetorical style and impact'.[14]

4.2.2. 2 Corinthians 1:8-11[15]

> [8]We do not want you to be unaware, brothers and sisters, of the affliction we experienced in Asia; for we were so utterly, unbearably crushed that we despaired of life itself. [9]Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death so that we would rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead. [10]He who rescued us from so deadly a peril will continue to rescue us; on him we have set our hope that he will rescue us again, [11]as you also join in helping us by your prayers, so that many will give thanks on our behalf for the blessing granted us through the prayers of many.

The specific context to this passage are Paul's opening remarks in 2 Corinthians 1:3-7 which comprise an extended reflection on the term *paraklēsis*[16] as the apostle thanks God not only for the consolation he has received from but also that which he is in a position to pass on to the Corinthians. Behind this confidence in the

---

[12] This irony seems deepened as the descriptions of the Corinthians bear close relation to their qualities listed in 1:26. See Fee, *1 Corinthians*, 174.

[13] Thiselton argues the dual descriptions of v13 are stronger than most English translations allow. He renders *perikatharmata tou kosmou* as 'the world's scum' and *pantōn peripsēma* as 'the scrapings from everyone's shoes'; such a powerful visual illustration would clearly have caught and arrested the attention of someone hearing this news. Thiselton, *1 Corinthians*, 364-365.

[14] Schrage, *Der erste Brief*, 331.

[15] It is recognised that this passage is not normally included in discussion of Paul's hardship narratives; however, the suffering which Paul clearly refers to suggests that it merits full inclusion in this present discussion.

[16] Variously translated in this context as 'comfort', 'consolation' and 'encouragement'. See Witherington, *Conflict and Community in Corinth*, 357; Barnett, *2 Corinthians*, 69-70.

comforting power of God is the reality of the apostle's own suffering. Paul refers five times to his own afflictions (vv4-7) and at one point describes them as 'the sufferings of Christ' (v5). While for the Corinthian readers these references might have caused them to think back to the hardships recorded in 1 Corinthians 4:9-13, Paul is about to give them another example of the suffering he has endured.

At first glance it appears that this passage has a clearer story behind it than in 1 Corinthians 4:9-13. In place of the general picture of weakness and suffering Paul relates a specific example of a *thlipseōs* ('affliction') which occurred to him in Asia (v8), an event about which he evidently wishes the Corinthians to be informed. Yet the happening to which Paul is referring is actually much less clear than one might expect. Barnett's argument that Paul is referring to the city-wide commotion in Ephesus which is recorded in Acts 19:23-20:1 seems more plausible than most, but a definitive answer does not seem possible.[17] What is more apparent, however, is the impact that the event had on Paul; indeed, the story behind this passage is more Paul's own emotional journey rather than the incident that triggered it. Paul describes himself reaching the very limits of his ability to cope (v8b); his reference to despairing of life hints at what might be diagnosed as depression in the life of the apostle.[18] That he went on to be rescued from this affliction (v10) does not take away from the fact that the prime focus in this short passage is the emotional brokenness and turmoil experienced by the apostle Paul, a path he expects to travel again in the future (v10b).

This passage has fewer rhetorical flourishes than the other passages being examined, although certain features are still worth pointing out. The disclosure

---

[17] See Barnett, 2 *Corinthians*, 83-84 and a similar reading in Wright, *Resurrection*, 298-299. Other options suggested include general persecution, an eye infection, migraine or fever; for a thorough discussion see Allo, *Seconde Epitre*, 15-19 and Margaret E Thrall, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, The International Critical Commentary, vol. 1 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994), 115-116.

[18] Wright, *Resurrection*, 298.

formula used in v8 'we do not want you to be unaware' has parallels elsewhere in Paul's letters;[19] part of its function is to draw particular attention to the information that follows.[20] There is also strong imagery used: *ebarēthēmen* ('crushed') is a particularly vivid word that Paul chooses to describe the way he was troubled; the image is of an overladen ship struggling to stay upright.[21] It is qualified by two similar phrases *kath' huperbolēn* (lit. 'far beyond') and *huper dunamin* (lit. 'beyond [our] power') which serve to reinforce the intensity of Paul's description.[22] The overall impression, both thematically and rhetorically, is of an almost overwhelming experience of suffering for the apostle, an experience which remains fresh in his mind and understanding of ministry. Paul wants his readers to know quite how low he was.

4.2.3. 2 Corinthians 4:7-12 & 6:4-10

> 7But we have this treasure in clay jars, so that it may be clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us. 8We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; 9persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; 10always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be made visible in our bodies. 11For while we live, we are always being given up to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus may be made visible in our mortal flesh. 12So death is at work in us, but life in you.
>
> 4but as servants of God we have commended ourselves in every way: through great endurance, in afflictions, hardships, calamities, 5beatings, imprisonments, riots, labours, sleepless nights, hunger; 6by purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, holiness of spirit, genuine love, 7truthful speech, and the power of God; with the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and for the left; 8in honour and dishonour, in ill repute and good repute. We are treated as imposters, and yet are true; 9as unknown, and yet are well known; as dying, and see–we are alive; as

---

[19] 2 Corinthians 8:1, Romans 1:13; 11:25; 1 Corinthians 10:1; 12:1; and 1 Thessalonians 4:13.

[20] Martin, 2 *Corinthians*, 14. For more see White, *Form and Function* .

[21] Barnett, 2 *Corinthians*, 84.

[22] Martin, 2 *Corinthians*, 13.

> punished and yet not killed; [10]as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing everything.

It may seem optimistic to study these passages together; there is a richness and density to each passage that defies brief analysis. Nevertheless, their proximity within 2 Corinthians, and their similarity in theme and structure, suggest that a shared analysis is appropriate. Furthermore, 6:4-10 can be understood as retelling with greater detail the general suffering described in 4:7-12;[23] as the specific focus of this introductory survey is to identify what sort of hardship Paul is referring to, as well as how he reports it, a joint study makes considerable sense. Certainly there is a level of continuity between the context of each passage. A recurring theme in chapters 3-6 (and, indeed, the whole letter) is Paul's *apologia* for the nature and practice of his ministry; the underlying question is whether Paul needs to commend himself, and if so, how he does it.[24] Thus the news of Paul's own hardship occurs, as in 1 Corinthians 4:8-13, at a point where Paul is describing what marks him out as an authentic apostle, as an 'ambassador of Christ' (5:20). Stylistically, the first passage in particular occurs after a nexus of contrasts: letter/Spirit, life/death, condemnation/justification, veiled/unveiled, light/darkness; all these are part of the imaginative background against which the reader hears of Paul's own suffering.[25]

Given the wealth of detail in both passages, attention will be given to identifying the broad categories of hardship which Paul describes, using 6:4-10 as the prime focus and on the understanding that it expands on categories of hardship outlined in 4:7-12. Four such categories might be briefly outlined. First, there are general sufferings arising from living and working in a fallen world. Although 'afflictions,

---

[23] This technique of supplying specific examples after general principles have been outlined is used again in 11:23-33. See discussion below.

[24] 3:1; 4:2; 5:12; 6:4.

[25] Timothy Savage explores in depth the connection between the language of glory on the one hand and the experience of weakness in Christian ministry on the other; see Savage, *Power through Weakness*, 103-163.

hardships and calamities' (6:4b) seem to increase in intensity, there is no indication that they are describing particular events in Paul's life; rather, they serve as signs that Paul is 'afflicted in every way' (4:8a). Second, Paul records events which are the direct result of his apostolic ministry (6:5). While it is not possible to be sure what specific happenings lie behind the beatings and imprisonments, they are broadly consistent with the picture of the life of an apostle in the book of Acts;[26] these perhaps are the 'persecutions' alluded to in 4:9a.[27] A third aspect to Paul's suffering is the emotional impact it has on the apostle; he shares with the Corinthians that he was 'sorrowful' (6:10) and 'perplexed' (4:8b). As in 2 Corinthians 1:8-11 these hardships have had a significant toll on the apostle; in the earlier passage Paul expresses this emotional nadir in terms of being near death (6:9b and especially 4:10-12).[28] The final aspect of the news in these passages is the nature of Paul's response. Here in both passages there is a degree of hope; the story is that Paul has withstood all the hardships of apostolic ministry and has emerged 'alive', 'rejoicing' and 'possessing everything' (6:9-10). The picture of Paul's suffering which emerges is of an apostle caught up in a suffering world and with a number of extra burdens to carry as a result of testifying to the gospel of God's grace (cf. Acts 20:26). The impact of these hardships has been to bring the apostle

---

[26] So Acts 13:50; 14:5, 19; 16:22, 23-40. Comments that according to Luke's narrative in Acts Paul had thus far only spent half a night in prison are wide of the mark; the book of Acts does not pretend to record all of Paul's ministry. Cf. Barrett, *Second Corinthians*, 295.

[27] We may add to this the phrase 'unknown' from 6:9a; it is argued that this phrase refers not to the fact that Paul was a non-entity in the early Christian world (a highly unlikely scenario), but rather that he was unrecognised as an authentic apostle. This too was a mark of Paul's suffering apostleship. See Thrall, *2 Corinthians vol 1*, 464. A further impact on Paul's life was his low social status (6:8); see previous comment on 1 Corinthians 4:8-13.

[28] In this latter passage Paul remarks he is carrying around the death of Jesus; among other things this seems to refer to the level of suffering which Paul considers he is undergoing. Commentators note that Paul uses the term *nekrōsis* instead of the more usual *thanatos* to describe the death of Jesus. Thrall discusses the possible meanings and agrees with Barrett that this term refers to the ongoing suffering which Paul regards as characteristic of the Christian life rather than a reference to the one-off event of Jesus' death. It is through this ongoing witness that the life of Jesus is revealed. Ibid., 332-335; Barrett, *Second Corinthians*, 140.

near to death; yet Paul continues to have a sense of hope and joy in the midst of his sufferings.

Both passages show considerable rhetorical sophistication; there is only space to identify the main characteristics. Paul makes effective use of imagery: the precise meaning of the clay jars picture (4:7) may be elusive, but the image is a powerful one which sets the tone for the later antithetical structure.[29] The 'weapons of righteousness for the right hand and the left' (6:7) is an example of Paul's well-used military imagery;[30] it lends to the picture of Paul the apostle a sense of vitality and determination. Paul uses antithetical structures extensively: in 4:8-9 there are four antitheses, and in 6:8-10 nine.[31] Through these phrases Paul expresses the tensions in his apostolic life, both the reality of suffering and the miracle of protection and provision.[32] Related to the antithetical structure is Paul's use of paradox; this is focussed around the idea of life and death and finds its fullest expression in 4:10-12, although there is more than a suggestion of it in 6:9b.[33] This use of paradox challenges and even unsettles the audience as the traditional understandings of life and death are stretched. Finally, Paul employs the rhetorical tool of repetition to great effect in the list of hardships in 6:4-7. The mounting intensity of the three nouns at the end of v4 has already been noted; this is increased as the preposition *en*

---

[29] The main debate concerns whether the clay jars are themselves disposable vessels of little worth or whether they are carried by people of little worth. Intertestamental and archaeological evidence is marshalled to support these and other suggestions, but the overall point seems clear, namely one of emphasising human frailty over divine glory. See especially Martin, *2 Corinthians*, 85.

[30] Cf. 2 Corinthians 10:3, 4 and also Romans 13:12 and Ephesians 6:13-18.

[31] For more see Ferrari, *Die Sprache des Leids*, 204-207 and 220-224.

[32] *Contra* the argument of Thrall who suggests that with the tight antithetical structure Paul's experience of suffering collapses into his experience of divine rescue; 'is there no perceptible difference between the real experience of persecution and the equally real experience of powerful divine assistance within this situation?' Thrall, *2 Corinthians vol 1*, 331. This argument may have more weight if Paul's sufferings were simply narrated within an antithetical frame, but as we have seen already and will see again, this is merely one of the literary devices Paul uses to frame his news.

[33] Barrett, *Second Corinthians*, 138-139; Martin, *2 Corinthians*, 83.

is repeated, enhancing the sense of pace and pressure as the hardships themselves become more extreme.[34]

4.2.4. 2 Corinthians 11:23-33

> [23]Are they ministers of Christ? I am talking like a madman–I am a better one: with far greater labours, far more imprisonments, with countless floggings, and often near death. [24]Five times I have received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. [25]Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I received a stoning. Three times I was shipwrecked; for a night and a day I was adrift at sea; [26]on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from bandits, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers and sisters; [27]in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, hungry and thirsty, often without food, cold and naked. [28]And, besides other things, I am under daily pressure because of my anxiety for all the churches. [29]Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to stumble, and I am not indignant? [30]If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness. [31]The God and Father of the Lord Jesus (blessed be he forever!) knows that I do not lie. [32]In Damascus, the governor under King Aretas guarded the city of Damascus in order to seize me, [33]but I was let down in a basket through a window in the wall, and escaped from his hands.

The immediate context of this passage is seemingly more challenging than any of the others. All commentators note the change of tone from 10:1, as Paul becomes at once both defensive about his own ministry and forceful in his criticism of the Corinthians and the 'super-apostles' who seem to be their new leaders.[35] In particular, Paul is discussing the idea of boasting, in which as we are aware, the Corinthians were prone to engage (10:12-18). Paul's challenge is that the Corinthians are boasting in entirely the wrong things, and seems provoked in response to boast himself (11:16-22). Displaying some of the most bitter irony in his oeuvre Paul begins by boasting 'according to human standards' (v18). In v22 he

---

[34] Ferrari, *Die Sprache des Leids*, 221.

[35] Of course this change is used by some commentators to argue that chs 10-13 should properly be regarded as a separate letter to chs 1-9. For a recent survey of these approaches and an argument for unity of 2 Corinthians see Hall, *The Unity of the Corinthian Correspondence*, 86-112.

affirms his similarity with the super-apostles on racial and religious grounds before asking the question 'Are they ministers of Christ?' (v23). It is in answer to this question, and 'talking like a madman', that Paul begins to retell his own sufferings.

Verse 23 functions as the introduction to this narrative; as I noted during my discussion of 4:7-12 and 6:4-10 Paul talks first in general terms about his physical suffering before going into more detail.[36] For the first time, however, Paul narrates these hardships at greater length than before (vv24-25): the number of times he received a certain form of hardship is listed, and this numerical data is accompanied by other illustrative information, even if it is not clear when these events actually happened.[37] Paul was not seeking to give proof to the Corinthians that these events happened (he assumes that they will believe this much of him), but he is simply trying to give practical examples of the type of suffering he has undergone, suffering which directly relates to his ministry as an apostle of Jesus Christ.[38] From these specific examples Paul switches to certain dangers which assault him from all directions, from both the elements and human agents (v26); he follows this with more practical implications of the costly apostolic life which has been his theme before (cf 1 Cor 4:11).

---

[36] The only term not already encountered in the hardship lists are the 'floggings' on which Paul will soon elaborate.

[37] Although there are no references in Acts to the thirty-nine lashes Paul received, the punishment itself is well documented in Mishnah *Mak 3:10* and Deuteronomy 25:2-3. See Martin, *2 Corinthians*, 376. Likewise, while there is no corroborative confirmation in Acts of the beating with rods or shipwrecks, it is not out of keeping with what we know about the pattern of the apostle's life. C.K. Barrett lists the ship journeys which Paul takes in the Acts narrative, and concludes that some sort of naval incident is highly likely to have occurred at some point. Barrett, *Second Corinthians*, 298. Obviously the shipwreck narrated in Acts 27:39-44 had yet to take place when 2 Corinthians was written.

[38] For more on how the punishments meted out on Paul might relate to his pastoral practice see Scott J. Hafemann, "A Call to Pastoral Suffering: The Need for Recovering Paul's Model of Ministry in 2 Corinthians," *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 4, no. 2 (2000) 29.

He ends, however, with two specific aspects of hardship which have not appeared before, and which seem at first sight somewhat unusual: his own concern for his churches (vv28-29) and his flight from Damascus (vv32-33). Scott Hafemann notes that it is striking that Paul ends his catalogue of afflictions not with any of his circumstantial sufferings but with his 'daily pressure because of my anxiety for all the churches'.[39] It may not seem as dramatic, but for Paul the burden of pastoral care for the churches he has planted is a heavy one; the Corinthians must have realised that he was referring, in part at least, to them.[40] Following this statement of concern there is the brief narration of the events concerning his escape from Damascus (vv32-33). Here the interpreter is on surer historical ground than anywhere else in the hardship narratives: the location is clear, the date is given some framework by the reference to King Aretas, and the story is told in a relatively detailed and clear way.[41] Yet the attempt by King Aretas to capture Paul seems a rather tame way with which to end such a highly-charged account of personal hardship; this has persuaded some commentators that these verses represent a later addition to the text.[42] Winter argues, however, that if the story is read in the light of the sophistic Corinth it narrates a tale of deep humiliation for Paul: 'Noteworthy sophists were met outside the city walls and escorted by the city fathers and young men of good birth. Paul, in fleeing over the wall under cover of night, resembles more an undesirable alien than a sought-after foreign sophist destined for citizenship and the honours of the council'.[43] The story is thus another example of the low reputation which Paul recognises he has acquired.

---

[39] Ibid.

[40] See Paul's concern for the Corinthian church expressed in 1:6; 2:4; 2:12-13; 4:12, 15; 7:3, 5; 11:2; 12:20-21; 13:9.

[41] For a discussion of the more complex chronological aspects see Martin, *2 Corinthians*, 385-386. For the modern reader there is correlation in the account in Acts 9:23-25, but obviously this would have been of no relevance to the original audience.

[42] For a further discussion of the arguments concerning the unity of chapter 11 see Ibid., 384.

[43] Winter, *Philo and Paul*, 226. See also Martin's suggestion that Paul is making an ironic link with Proverbs 21:22 'One wise person went up against a city of warriors and brought down the stronghold in which they trusted.' Martin argues that Paul frames his telling of the Damascus episode in deliberate contrast to this image: compared to this 'wise' example who

There are a number of new rhetorical features to be seen in this passage, together with some other characteristics which have been seen elsewhere. First, the irony with which Paul begins this passage is immediately arresting; in v23 he takes the Corinthians' boasting and mocks it, turning it upside down by boasting of his greater number of afflictions and hardships. Paul uses repetition in v23 and vv26-7 as he heaps nouns on top of each other; in vv26-27 this repetition is enhanced by the use of the word *kindunois* ('dangers') which acts as a focus for the rapidly changing nouns. A new rhetorical feature to note is the use of enumeration in vv24-25. Not only does this add interest to the list of nouns, it also strengthens its impact and creates a level of intensity in the text.[44] Finally, it is worth remarking on the sophisticated use of rhythm and pace that Paul employs. The speed changes frequently throughout this short passage as rhythmic lists give way to enumerative phrases, rhetorical questions or bald narrative. In summary, this passage is possibly the most highly charged piece of news handling that Paul undertakes; there is considerable variety here in terms of the stories selected, the way they are framed and the style in which they are shared.

4.2.5. Summary

The above survey of the news of his own hardship which Paul shares has revealed the stories are far from monochrome in either content or form. Noting that the news often occurs at points where Paul is defending the nature and practice of his ministry, it is also possible to identify four aspects of Paul's suffering which are common themes across the five passages.

---

scaled the walls and experienced victory, Paul's story is of being let through the wall thereby acknowledging defeat (Martin, 2 *Corinthians*, 384-385). Also Forbes' proposal that it is a conscious parody of the criterion for the award of the *corona muralis*, the Roman decoration for the first soldier up the wall in a besieged city. Christopher Forbes, "Comparison, Self-Praise and Irony: Paul's Boasting and Conventions of Hellenistic Rhetoric," *New Testament Studies* 32 (1986) 21.

[44] Ferrari, *Die Sprache des Leids*, 241-248. Barnett makes a comparison with a similar practice of Augustus. See Barnett, 2 *Corinthians*, 541.

First, Paul uses a range of terms to describe the physical hardship he has endured. To an extent this is simply the result of living in a fallen world, but most of this bodily suffering stems from Paul's ministry as an apostle, either through the travelling he undertakes, the tentmaking he continues to pursue, or the opposition and persecution he attracts from those opposed to the gospel of Christ. 2 Corinthians 11:26-27 gives a remarkable picture of a man at the limit of physical endurance. Second, Paul describes the impact this physical hardship has on him. He presents himself in weakness, not afraid to admit to the emotional pain and anguish his ministry has caused him. Often this emotional burden takes the form of making Paul think he is near death; in four of the five passages Paul makes explicit reference to how close he feels to death.[45] 2 Corinthians 1:8-9 is the best example both of Paul's emotional frankness and the reality of how he believes his apostolic service has taken him close to death. Third, Paul emphasises how this suffering has a public dimension; a recurring theme is the low social status that is accorded to Paul as an apostle. In the face of a church in successful Corinth Paul tells stories which demonstrate that his weakness has been visible to all. He is exhibited at the end of the procession of the condemned (1 Cor 4:10), the scum of the world (1 Cor 4:13), in visible despair in Asia (2 Cor 1:8-9), and held in ill repute (2 Cor 6:8). Paul's version of his Damascus escape is particularly telling in this respect; while Luke records the event as a story of a miraculous escape (Acts 9:23-25), Paul recounts it as an example of humiliation – the apostle of Jesus Christ having to scuttle away in a basket. Finally, Paul also shares with the Corinthians that his suffering is not without hope. It is true that his afflictions as an apostle are ongoing, but Paul does not feel defeated. With the exception of 2 Corinthians 11:23-33 all the passages

---

[45] 1 Cor 4:9; 2 Cor 1:8-9; 4:11; 6:9. The theme of Paul's proximity to death is, however, wider than these references. As C.K. Barrett observes, part of the drama of 2 Corinthians is the way Paul seems to be living 'on the frontier between life and death.' Barrett, *Second Corinthians*, 65.

examined include the news that Paul is able to continue his ministry in spite of his hardships; he can do so with joy and hope in the future.[46]

The above survey has also revealed the extent to which Paul draws on rhetorical techniques in his reportage of news. At different points he uses irony in his attempt to contrast his lifestyle with that of the Corinthians and the 'super-apostles'; he also employs repetition to emphasise the ongoing nature of his suffering and enumeration to give weight to the extent to which he has suffered. He makes use of antithesis and paradox to draw attention to the tensions within his own apostolic ministry, together with powerful imagery and vocabulary which provide a vivid illustration of Paul's radical understanding of his own identity and ministry. Yet to identify the content in Paul's hardship narratives and the form in which he reports them is only to prepare the ground for the more critical question which needs to be asked, namely whether such a handling of news is consistent with the model of communication Paul sets himself in 1 Corinthians 2:1-5. It is to that question that this study now turns.

4.3. Theological Analysis

4.3.1. Introduction

To examine the theology implied in Paul's hardship narratives is to adopt an approach not generally taken by scholars in this area. Developing Bultmann's analysis of 1910 which highlights comparisons between Paul and Cynic writers, research has focussed on the extent to which Paul drew on other hardship lists in ancient literature.[47] Robert Hodgson marshals other examples of 'tribulation lists' from Jewish and Roman sources to argue that the form was widely used at the time

---

[46] e.g. 1 Cor 4:12; and especially the antithetical structures in 2 Cor 1:10; 4:8-9; 6:9-10.

[47] Rudolf Karl Bultmann, *Der Stil der paulinischen Predigt und die kynischstische Diatribe*, Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1910). The technical term -'*peristasis* catalogues' - comes from the Greek term for 'circumstances', often understood to be harsh. It is used most often in German scholarship as *Peristasenkatalogen*.

of Paul's writing.[48] John T. Fitzgerald makes a closer examination of the Cynic-Stoic use of hardship lists to argue that in adopting this literary form Paul is depicting himself as an ideal philosopher in the model of a Sage.[49] Fitzgerald rightly recognises that Paul's hardship narratives often occur at the point where Paul is defending his own ministry, but he underestimates what renders Paul distinct from his social and rhetorical context, and only hints at Paul's wider theological agenda.[50] Similarly, Schiefer Ferrari does an exceptionally thorough job in examining Paul's hardship lists, particularly their rhetorical structure and function; yet while he does admit that Paul's catalogues of affliction are different to any other in the ancient world, he does not explore at any length the theological agenda that drives Paul's communication in this way.[51]

An early article, however, suggests that such an enquiry has considerable potential. Wolfgang Schrage argues strongly for a close connection to be made between the hardship lists and Paul's *theologia crucis*.[52] According to Schrage Paul relates his suffering in a way that identifies himself as a follower of the crucified Christ;[53] his own understanding and reportage of his personal hardship is rooted in the suffering of Christ on the cross.[54] Schrage admits the possibility that Stoic imagery may have been relevant to Paul's readers, but maintains that Paul's agenda in sharing stories of his own suffering is fundamentally different to that of the Sage.[55] Thiselton recognises the strength of this approach with respect to 1 Corinthians 4:8-13;[56] it is

---

[48] Hodgson, "Tribulation Lists," .

[49] John T. Fitzgerald, *Cracks in an Earthen Vessel: An Examination of the Catalogues of Hardships in the Corinthian Correspondence*, Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series (Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1988).

[50] Ibid., 207.

[51] Ferrari, *Die Spruche des Leids* .

[52] Wolfgang Schrage, "Leid, Kreuz und Eschaton: Die Peristasenkataloge als Merkmale paulinischer *theologia crucis* und Eschatologie," *Evangelische Theologie* 34, no. 2 (1974).

[53] Ibid. 158.

[54] Ibid. 162-164.

[55] Ibid. 147-150.

[56] Thiselton, *1 Corinthians*, 365-368.

also my belief that Schrage's perspective remains a vital one to understand Paul's hardship lists as examples of news. It is with his approach in mind that I will explore how Paul's news of his own hardship is consistent, both in form and content, with the cruciform communication described in 1 Corinthians 2:1-5.

4.3.2. Cross-shaped Content

It is not the task of this section to argue that the passages considered above are to be understood *exclusively* as examples of Paul's emphasis on the cross in his communication; rather the aim is to see whether the content of this area of Paul's news is consistent with the pattern of communication which Paul outlines in 1 Corinthians 2:1-5. I will argue that each of the four aspects of Paul's news outlined above (his weakness, physical suffering, poor reputation and abiding hope) is based on the apostle's understanding of the cross of Christ.

First, the cross of Christ has transformed Paul's understanding of weakness. 1 Corinthians 1:18-25 describes Paul's fundamental understanding of the death of Christ as the place where God's character is seen; a crucified Messiah may seem to indicate foolishness and weakness on God's part, but Paul's belief is that for those who are being saved through the cross it is the wisdom and power of God (vv18, 24-25).[57] In Paul's theology this insight sets up an ongoing paradigm for the way God's activity can be seen in the world; if the weakness of the cross is the location for God's life-giving power to be at work (2 Cor 13:4a) it follows that God can be similarly at work through human weakness (2 Cor 13:4b). It is this principle that is reaffirmed for Paul as he endures the 'thorn in the flesh' (2 Cor 12:7-9); when this affliction is not taken away Paul receives the word from God, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness' (2 Cor 12:9a).[58] Thus Paul is not

---

[57] Schrage, *Der erste Brief*, 229.

[58] Timothy Savage takes this verse as the starting point to his work into 2 Corinthians, and especially chapter 4. 'Insofar as Paul was conformed to the humility of Christ he, too, became a fitting vessel for the experience of divine power.' Savage, *Power through Weakness*, 187.

afraid to share news of how his hardships have impacted on his life, especially emotionally; indeed he boasts in the things that make him appear weak because to do so recognises the way in which God works: 'I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me' (2 Cor 12:9b).[59] Thus Paul's disclosure of his own emotional vulnerability and human frailty is rooted in his understanding of God's character and activity found in the cross of Christ.[60]

Second, the crucified Christ sets the pattern for authentic discipleship. Paul develops the argument of 1 Corinthians 1:18-25 to show how the cruciform nature of God's power and wisdom serves not only as a pattern for the Corinthian church (1:26-31) but also for the ministry of the apostle himself (2:1-5). Paul understands the death of Jesus as not only a one-off salvific event but also as characteristic of his own discipleship of Jesus Christ.[61] It is this understanding that is behind his reference to 'carrying in the body the death of Jesus' (2 Cor 4:10);[62] the reference to the 'sufferings of Christ' (2 Cor 1:5) also illustrates how Paul sees a level of continuity between the passion of Christ and his own present hardship. While this imitation of Christ (cf Phil 3:10) does not imply a repetition of his death as a saving event, it does represent the key criterion for faithful Christian living;[63] to be an authentic follower of Jesus Christ is to bear similar marks as those borne by Jesus.[64] Paul is thus not ashamed to record the hardships he has endured during his

---

[59] See a helpful summary by Barrett of the general application of this principle: 'it means one can rejoice in tribulation because a scene of human weakness is the best possible stage for the display of divine power.' Barrett, *Second Corinthians*, 317.

[60] This Christological emphasis is important to maintain. Jervell fails to appreciate fully the role that the cross plays in Paul's understanding of God's power and human weakness. See Jacob Jervell, "Der schwache Charismatiker," in *Rechtfertigung: Festschrift für Ernst Käsemann zum 70. Geburtstag*, ed. Wolfgang Pöhlmann Johannes Friedrich, and Peter Stuhlmacher (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1976), 60 and a critique of this general approach in Schrage, "Leid, Kreuz und Eschaton," 153.

[61] Thiselton, *1 Corinthians*, 147.

[62] See note 28 in this chapter for the significance of the term *nekrōsis* which Paul uses.

[63] Schrage, "Leid, Kreuz und Eschaton," 162.

[64] This is also the pattern set by Jesus himself (Mark 8:34-35), although it is not clear if Paul was aware of this via an oral tradition.

apostolic ministry. Indeed, in the face of a Corinthian audience that was doubting his apostolic legitimacy, such reports serve as a validation and confirmation of his integrity and authenticity as a disciple of Christ.[65] It is no coincidence that when Paul's legitimacy is being most sharply questioned as a result of the 'super-apostles' he responds with his longest and most detailed catalogue of hardship (2 Cor 11:23-33). It is in conformity to the pattern of the cross that the evidence of true discipleship is to be found, and it is this understanding that informs Paul's sharing of news of his own hardship.

Third, living according to the cross of Christ involves a re-assessment of the world's value system. In 1 Corinthians 1:18-25 Paul establishes the principle that the cross carries no prestige in the eyes of the world; Christ crucified is 'a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles' (v23). According to a human understanding, the cross appears a failure. To embrace the cross, therefore, as both a way of salvation and pattern of living is to adopt a thoroughly counter-cultural world view; as Schrage comments, 'the cross is a stumbling-block and foolishness not only with respect to an understanding of God and salvation; it also implies...a crisis and re-evaluation of all values'.[66] Paul provides one example of this in 1 Corinthians 2:1-5; his understanding of the task of preaching is informed not by the secular value system of the sophists but by his own modelling of the cross of Christ. He continues this counter-cultural position in his reportage of news. That news of his own suffering will mark him out as a failure in the eyes of the Christians in successful Corinth is of little concern to Paul; indeed, that he goes out of his way to record his own humiliation (1 Cor 4:9, 13 and especially 2 Cor 11:32-33) may be taken as evidence that Paul wishes to demonstrate through stories of his own hardship that

---

[65] Commenting on 1 Corinthians 4:8-13 Schrage notes how Paul's news of his own suffering is framed consciously in opposition to the Corinthians' understanding of the Christian life: 'In the face of the Corinthian enthusiasts, what matters [for Paul] is that Christian living is characterised by the cross and lived out in the hardships and problems (*Peristasen und Aporien*) of this world'. Schrage, *Der erste Brief*, 344.

[66] Ibid., 165. See also Galatians 6:4.

he is not seeking a reputation measured by the critical canons of the age. Paul's news sets him apart as a fool (1 Cor 4:10; 2 Cor 11:16-21), but the foolishness of the cross provides the framework for this behaviour.

Fourth, the cross of Christ gives Paul an eschatological perspective on present suffering. It is Paul's understanding that the death of Christ has inaugurated a new age but it is an age which has yet to be fully consummated.[67] The cross was not the end of God's dealings with the world, but rather the beginning of a process in which the present age would disappear and a new age would come into being.[68] Paul thus follows up his exploration of the cross of Christ with a number of references to 'this age' which is fading away (1 Cor 1:20; 2:6-8; 3:18); the Corinthians are reminded not only that the future will be consummated with the coming of the Lord (4:5), but also that this remains a future event (see the ironic 'already' in 4:8). Paul's suffering occurs at the intersection of the two ages: because the kingdom has yet to be consummated suffering will continue to be a part of Christian existence; nevertheless the coming power of God may be seen in Paul's endurance of these sufferings (2 Cor 4:8-9), indeed in his capacity to know God's life-giving power and transforming joy in the midst of such hardship (2 Cor 4:10-11 and 6:9-10).[69] The cross thus opens up to Paul a future perspective to his suffering, one which allows him to describe his present hardships as 'this slight momentary affliction [which] is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond measure' (2 Cor 4:18).[70] Moreover, in testifying to God's transforming power in the midst of suffering Paul

---

[67] It is right to note that most of Paul's discussion in the Corinthian correspondence on eschatology is with respect to the resurrection (cf. 1 Cor 15:12-57), but Schrage is correct to argue that the resurrected one is none other than the crucified one. Schrage, "Leid, Kreuz und Eschaton," 165.

[68] For more on this see Brian K. Peterson, *Eloquence and the Proclamation of the Gospel in Corinth*, Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series 163 (Atlanta, Ga.: Scholars Press, 1998), 5ff.

[69] So Scott Hafemann 'If Paul's suffering is a sign that the kingdom of God has *not yet* been consummated, his endurance is evidence that it *has been* inaugurated' (author's italics). Hafemann, "Call to Pastoral Suffering," 27

[70] Schrage, "Leid, Kreuz und Eschaton," 170.

is embodying the eschatological dimension of the cross, namely that God's glory is to be seen even in the present day (2 Cor 3:18; 4:6). Paul has thus further reason to boast in his sufferings, because in his capacity to endure will be recognised the power of the coming kingdom of God.[71]

It has been shown that the content of Paul's news about his own hardship is informed by the same focus on the cross that shapes Paul's general understanding of communication as set out in 1 Corinthians 2:1-5. Paul's emphasis on his own emotional weakness and frailty stems from an understanding of God's power being seen in the weakness of the cross; the prominence given to physical suffering rests on Paul's appreciation that the pattern of Christian living is likely to be cruciform; the disregard paid to Paul's own reputation in the eyes of the world is the result of a fundamental paradigm shift that has occurred in the life of the apostle who has witnessed the foolishness of the cross; the sense of patient endurance and hope is based on a belief that the cross has ushered in a new age that will one day be consummated, and yet whose power can be experienced in the present time. Just as 'Christ and him crucified' shapes Paul's understanding of communication, so it is also behind the content of the news he handled repeatedly in his correspondence with the Corinthian church.[72]

4.3.3. Cross-shaped Form

It remains to be asked, however, whether the form in which Paul shares these stories is consistent with their theological foundation. The pattern set by 1 Corinthians 2:1-5 is that, given the nature of Paul's message, there should be a coherence between content and form. Paul believes that to speak of the cross of

---

[71] There is an obvious contrast here with the self-sufficiency so valued in the Sage (Fitzgerald, *Cracks in an Earthen Vessel*, 115). Paul's ability to cope with suffering rests entirely on the power of God (Schrage, *Der erste Brief*, 342).

[72] See Schrage, "Leid, Kreuz und Eschaton," 158. 'The content and manner of gospel ministry, that is, the message of the cross and the behaviour described in the *Peristasenkataloge* are consistent with one another.'

Christ must involve rejecting the practice of sophistic rhetoric which sought applause and recognition before all things and instead to speak in a way that gives priority to the message. Given that the content of Paul's news stories is also dominated on a theological level by the cross of Christ, it follows that in their form there should be evidence of Paul pursuing a form of rhetoric distinct to that of the prevailing culture. The challenge is a sharp one; it has already been noted that Paul employs a range of rhetorical techniques in the course of his hardship narratives. The question is thus: do these rhetorical techniques illustrate Paul's theological argument or undermine it? To address this question it will be necessary to examine briefly what forms of rhetoric Paul eschews, before considering whether the rhetorical forms he does use actually reinforce the cross-shaped nature of Paul's news.[73]

It has already been argued that Paul reports his stories in such a way as to maximise the contrast between himself and the sophistic speakers of the day (see especially the comments on 2 Cor 11:32-33). Continuing along this trajectory it is possible to argue that Paul avoids three specific characteristics of sophistic rhetoric. First, Paul does not shape his stories in such a way as to flatter his audience or win applause; as will be further explored in the next chapter, while the sophists' technique was dominated by how their speaking would be received, this does not seem to be a concern for Paul in the way he reports news of his own hardship. His rhetoric may be subtle and complex, but his pointed use of irony and shocking imagery and vocabulary is likely to challenge and unsettle an audience rather than please it. Second, Paul does not use rhetoric designed to arouse pathos in the heart of the listener. Although far from restricted to sophistic rhetoric, inspiring sympathy would often be part of a speaker's aim as part of their overall strategy; it is easy to imagine how Paul might have employed such tactics to make the Corinthian Christians feel sorry for him. Yet, as Schiefer Ferrari has argued, while Paul does

---

[73] See also later discussion applying a hermeneutic of suspicion to these texts. See section 5.5. below.

refer to the amount of suffering he has experienced he does so in a condensed way without offering the sort of detail that might inspire more pathos.[74] His aim is not to secure the support of the community to which he writes but to testify to his own sharing in the suffering and life of Christ.[75] The final form of rhetoric which Paul seems to reject is that designed to make the audience yield to a certain opinion. It has already been argued that this was a clear area of difference between 'primary' and 'secondary' rhetoric; the former sought to present truth to people and persuade, the latter aimed to make people adopt the point of view being offered.[76] While Paul's hardship narratives are powerful sections of writing they are not specifically structured to make the audience believe certain things. The evidence is that, inasmuch as it was possible to transfer sophistic rhetoric into a written medium, Paul rejects rhetorical forms which would have aligned him with the popular communicators of the day.

Yet Paul undoubtedly did use certain rhetorical forms in his writing; it must be seen whether these reinforce or undermine his cruciform message. A helpful way forward here is suggested by the work of Karl A. Plank who explores the role played by irony in 1 Corinthians 1-4 with particular reference to 4:9-13.[77] He identifies a use of an 'irony of dissimulation' which aims to unmask the pretence of the Corinthian Christians and an 'irony of paradox' which contrasts the life of the apostle Paul with that of his readers.[78] Paul uses irony in 4:9-13 because he wants to disturb the Corinthians' assumptions about their own reality.[79] Yet it is the reason Plank identifies for this use of irony that is so important; for Plank the key point is that this 'rhetoric of irony' stems from a fundamental value shift that is rooted in the

---

[74] Ferrari, *Die Sprache des Leids*, 341-345.

[75] Ibid., 348. Schrage agrees with this analysis and suggests that Paul is here distancing himself from other rhetorical models of his age. Schrage, *Der erste Brief*, 332-333.

[76] Litfin, *Paul's Theology of Proclamation*, 109-136.

[77] Karl A. Plank, *Paul and the Irony of Affliction*, The Society of Biblical Literature Semeia Series (Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1987).

[78] Ibid., 33-62.

[79] See also a helpful discussion in Thiselton, *1 Corinthians*, 367.

paradox of the cross as expressed by Paul in 1:18-25.[80] For this reason Plank suggests 'the way of the cross and the way of irony are one way'.[81] This argument is highly suggestive; Plank is arguing that Paul's use of a rhetorical device is actually determined by his theology of the cross. This opens up the possibility that Paul's use of other rhetorical devices is not only consistent with, but also shaped by, his overall theological message.[82] The brief survey of Paul's use of rhetorical forms below will examine, therefore, if they are consistent with Paul's cruciform message, and if they are in fact determined by his emphasis on the cross of Christ.

Paul's use of repetition has already been remarked on. The apostle uses lists of nouns and repeated prepositions which build pressure and serve to heighten the impact of the suffering Paul is describing; they create a powerful picture of a litany of travails that are the nature of Paul's life.[83] The use of repetition can be understood, however, as having a theological function as well. The long lists and repeated prepositions produce an image of ongoing suffering that is consistent with Paul's understanding of cross-centred living. Paul's message is that suffering is the permanent mark of the Christian who lives in the shadow of the cross; the use of repetition serves to illustrate that Paul's hardships are not one-off events but rather the recurrent pattern of his apostolic life. A similar case may be made with respect to Paul's use of imagery which is again shaped by his overall message. His images (the clay pots, procession of a condemned man, the rubbish of the world) are images of brokenness determined by his theological theme; as rhetorical tools they may create an impact but they are not in themselves impressive.[84] Indeed, one of the most enduring images from this example of Pauline news is the flight of Paul from Damascus in which the apostle descends from that city in a basket (2 Cor 11:23-33);

---

[80] Plank, *Paul and the Irony of Affliction*, 16-19.

[81] Ibid., 31.

[82] Plank indeed hints that this might be the case. Ibid., 80-90.

[83] Ferrari, *Die Sprache des Leids*, 341. Also Plank, *Paul and the Irony of Affliction*, 81-84.

[84] Plank, *Paul and the Irony of Affliction*, 85ff.

as Paul paints the picture it is one of humiliation. Paul's use of images appears not to be a rhetorical strategy designed to impress; its purpose is instead to bring home with greater power the paradoxical message that the Christian life should be shaped by the death of Christ.[85] Just as Paul's life makes the way of the cross visible, so the images he uses in his news serve to make his message more vivid.

It is, however, in Paul's use of antithesis and paradox that the greater theological depth is to be found. Paul's use of antithesis is widespread, and it has been noted that it lends to Paul's depictions of his suffering a sense of balance and poise that stops them being just a litany of woe. Yet these antitheses do also have a theological function; they serve to embody linguistically the eschatological tension which is at the heart of Paul's idea of living in Christ.[86] Paul's eschatology itself is antithetical; it is a balance between 'already' and 'not yet', and thus it is entirely appropriate that it is expressed in such terms in his news. The heart of cross-centred living can be found in the phrase *all' ouk* ('but not') which is the refrain in 2 Corinthians 4:8-9. Paul's use of antithesis is thus not a clever way of making an impression but rather an apposite and necessary expression of his understanding of living this side of the cross.[87] Likewise, Paul's use of paradox can be said to be determined theologically. At the heart of the cross for Paul is a paradox, that death can bring about life, and that life comes out of death. Moreover, just as the cross is not just a one-off event but an ongoing metaphor for God's activity in the world, so the paradox of life and death reaches beyond the events of Calvary. Paul tells the Corinthians that death in him brings life to them (2 Cor 4:12); the suffering of Paul's apostolic ministry, which takes him so often near death, brings about the fruit of new life in people, such as

---

[85] Ibid., 85-90.

[86] Plank explores the role that antithesis plays in Paul's rhetorical aims but does not go further to draw the deeper theological implications of this rhetorical device. Ibid., 80ff.

[87] See Schrage, "Leid, Kreuz und Eschaton," 168 – 'because in Christ the power of God has broken in victoriously in the weakness of the one who died, and because the crucified one is also the risen one, Paul can, and indeed must, express his *Peristasenkataloge* dialectically and speak antithetically'.

the Corinthians, who are coming to faith in Jesus Christ.[88] Paul's use of paradoxical expression in his framing of news is thus not an attempt to baffle or confuse, but a necessary way of giving shape to his overall theological message, namely the life-giving death of Jesus Christ.[89]

It is not possible to say with any certainty that Paul consciously chose to use these rhetorical tools with his overall theological message in mind, just as scholars cannot be certain that he adapted inherited rhetorical models from Greco-Roman culture. What the above analysis does suggest, however, is that Paul's rhetorical devices do not contradict or undermine his overall theological message but serve rather to support and reinforce it. Both what Paul rejects and what he adopts are consistent with his overall theology of the cross. While it is clear that the hardship lists are powerful pieces of writing, it is not the case that Paul is reverting to the sort of sophistic brilliance that he claimed earlier to reject. Rather the form of Paul's news, in all its rhetorical subtlety, is itself shaped by the theological message behind his news, that is, the cross of Christ.

4.4. Conclusions

This chapter has argued that there is both an internal and external consistency in Paul's handling of news. The internal consistency is to be found in the way in which both the content and form of Paul's hardship narratives are shaped by the same theological paradigm, namely the cross of Christ. It has been demonstrated that not only are Paul's afflictions to be understood as expressions of his *theologia crucis*, but also that the manner in which they are presented is itself determined by the death of Christ.[90] Bruce Winter is, therefore, correct when he argues with respect to 2 Corinthians 10-13 that 'the dispute in Corinth did not pit an untrained

---

[88] Barrett, *Second Corinthians*, 142.

[89] Schrage, "Leid, Kreuz und Eschaton," 174. See also Hafemann, "Call to Pastoral Suffering," 25 and Savage, *Power through Weakness*, 186.

[90] See also confirmation of this conclusion in Cousar, *Theology of the Cross*, 166.

rhetorician against sophistic Christian leaders in Corinth. Paul demonstrated substantial rhetorical skills in his struggle against opponents in 2 Corinthians 10-13. His strategy was, however, controlled by an all-encompassing theological interpretation of weakness which was erected upon the paradigm of the Messiah crucified in weakness but now reigning by the power of God (13.4).'[91]

This internal consistency also opens up the way to an external consistency. It was the aim of this chapter to examine whether the cruciform model of communication which Paul sets himself in 1 Corinthians 2:1-5 was put into practice in Paul's handling of his own news. Paul claimed in that former passage that his communication was not defined by practical expediency or rhetorical brilliance but rather by the controlling theological idea of the cross of Christ. By identifying the internal theological consistency in Paul's hardship narratives it has been possible to confirm that this claim was not an empty one but rather was embodied in the category of Paul's news that has been examined. Paul's news about his own suffering – in both form and content – reflects the theological priorities which Paul sets himself in 1 Corinthians 2:1-5. To use earlier terms from this thesis, the meaning of 'event', 'story' and 'product' for Paul are all informed by a theology of the cross. It seems appropriate to refer not only to 'cruciform communication' but also, with respect to these hardship narratives, to 'cruciform news'. Such an understanding of news may well have a number of challenges for contemporary communicators; before such conclusions are drawn, however, it is necessary to explore in more detail the nature of the reception this news is likely to have had in the Corinthian church, in order to understand how costly Paul's communicative choices really were.

---

[91] Winter, *Philo and Paul*, 229.

5. RECEPTION: PAUL'S AUDIENCE AND THEIR RESPONSE TO HIS NEWS

5.1. Introduction

The focus of this chapter is an examination of how Paul's news about his own hardship and suffering, news which I have described as 'cruciform', was received by the Christians in Corinth. The rationale behind this approach is twofold: first, modern communicative theory places great weight on the role of the audience in framing a critical understanding of news. It is regarded as insufficient to analyse news solely from the perspective of the producer; instead, a crucial question to ask is how news is received by its intended audience.[1] As outlined in chapter two, the model used for both Paul and the empirical case studies is one not only of production and text but also reception. Second, and more significantly, such an approach will enable more to be said about the choices which Paul is making in his communication of news. An analysis of the possible reaction of the Corinthian audience to the reports of Paul's suffering will reveal how the news Paul shared was different from the news which the Corinthians expected or wanted, and as this context becomes more full it will be easier to appreciate fully the complex choices which faced Paul as he wrote to the church in Corinth. To see how the news was received is to open up the question of how costly this form of news handling was for Paul, as well as what alternatives to cruciform news existed then (and may exist now).

In this chapter I will argue that, notwithstanding the difficulties in undertaking a reception analysis of Paul's hardship narratives, a proper understanding of the Corinthian context and a sensitive reading of 2 Corinthians 10:10 and 11:6 can

---

[1] Klaus Jensen, *Making Sense of the News: Towards a Theory and an Empirical Model of Reception for the Study of Mass Communication* (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 1986); Ingunn Hagen and Janet Wasko, eds., *Consuming Audiences? Production and Reception in Media Research* (Cresskill, N.J.: Hampton Press, 2000); Dennis McQuail, *Audience Analysis* (London: SAGE, 1998).

provide a productive framework in which the stories of Paul's own suffering can themselves be read. I will then sketch how the different aspects of Paul's hardship narratives might have been received before suggesting a possible reconstruction of why this was the case. I will then conclude by assessing this reconstruction from the perspective of a hermeneutic of suspicion; in so doing I will be recognising the different ways Pauline texts and read and received today, and letting this diversity inform my wider conclusions. This chapter will be necessarily more provisional in its conclusions than previous ones, but it will still shed important light on Paul's communicative strategy with respect to news.

5.2. Pauline Reception Analysis: Problems and Possibilities

5.2.1. A Challenging Task

An enquiry into how Paul's news, as expressed in the two extant Corinthian letters, was received by its audience has one significant challenge to overcome: a paucity of data. Traditional reception analysis usually draws on data gathered directly from recipients of news, often in the form of focus groups or interviews, as well as other structured exercises.[2] No such data exist from the Corinthian church; there are no extant letters from that community to the apostle Paul or anybody else. Indeed, there is no written record of what the Corinthian church thought about anything, apart from those comments which appear in the two letters of Paul which in turn found their way into the scriptural canon.[3] It is inevitable that the Corinthians had some response to Paul's news but the modern commentator has no direct access to it.

---

[2] For an example of this multi-layered approach see Miller and others, *Circuit of Mass Communication* .

[3] The late first-century document *1 Clement* was addressed to the church in Corinth, but while it indicates that division in the church continued, it gives no indication of how the church responded specifically to Paul's ministry or news, although Clement is clearly aware of Paul's letters and his own costly ministry (*1 Clement* 5:5-6; 47:1-3).

The only data available, therefore, are from one side of the conversation, namely the apostle Paul's, but to pursue this approach involves considering another set of problems. For while, as with any telephone conversation, a certain amount may be found out about what the other party is saying through direct quotations,[4] tone of expression and general content, such a mirror-reading approach is fraught with danger.[5] The temptation is to read too much into Paul's comments, as if everything he said was a result of a problem he was encountering, rather than perhaps a message he had decided he wished to share anyway.[6] In this way Paul can appear to be a very reactive figure, and not as in control of his theological message and method as his stated objectives of 1 Corinthians 2:1-5 might imply. Moreover, such an approach can produce wildly speculative results about the opposition Paul was facing; an examination of the studies on the precise identity of the 'super-apostles' shows how mirror-readings of limited data can produce hugely divergent results.[7] The paucity of data for a reception analysis of Paul's news means that any conclusions reached will have to be regarded at best as tentative and provisional. The absence of direct data from the Corinthian community means that any conclusions drawn about that church's response to Paul's news will have to be necessarily cautious and limited in their scope.

5.2.2. A Way Forward

While recognising that there is much about the Corinthian response that is impossible to know, or can only be inferred, the task ahead is not without hope. Despite the lack of explicit data about how the Christians in Corinth reacted to

---

[4] With respect to his communicative practice Paul apparently quotes the Corinthians in two places – 2 Corinthians 10:10 and 11:6. For discussion of these verses see below.

[5] George Lyons discusses the possibilities and shortcomings of mirror-readings with respect to Galatians, but his conclusions about the perils of such an approach are of wider relevance. Lyons, *Pauline Autobiography*, 96-105.

[6] Winter, *Philo and Paul*, 180-182. Savage, *Power through Weakness*, 10-11.

[7] Martin, *2 Corinthians*, 334-342; Jerry L. Sumney, *Identifying Paul's Opponents: the Question of Method in 2 Corinthians*, Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series ; 40 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1990), 85-125; Thrall, "Super-Apostles".

Paul's news, the modern reader still knows more about the Corinthian church and its context than perhaps any other early Christian community. Within the New Testament there are more words addressed to the Corinthians than any other early church; moreover, as has already been examined, historical and archaeological research has left us with a rich description of that ancient city and the community which flourished there. It is not unreasonable to hope, therefore, that if the main characteristics of the city of Corinth and its Christian community are borne in mind, we will find ourselves on firmer ground when it comes to examining how the believers responded to Paul's news. In short, the more that is known about the sort of place Corinth was, the sort of people the Corinthians were, the sort of fashions that existed at the time, and the way all three affected the Christian community, the more confidence may be had in suggesting the responses which the Corinthians are likely to have had to Paul's news. There is little merit in retracing ground already covered in outlining the Corinthian context,[8] but it is appropriate to remind ourselves of three characteristics of the city and its church.

First, Corinth was a city where sophistic speakers played a highly visible and significant role; in their desire to win applause, followers and financial success they contributed to an atmosphere of competitive rhetoric where the content of a speech mattered less than the manner of its delivery. Furthermore, it seems from the terms Paul uses in 1 Corinthians 2:1-5, especially the form of speech he claims to be rejecting, that this sophistic movement had gained a hold in the Christian church in Corinth. Paul explicitly eschews the form of speech which was certainly popular in the city of Corinth at the time, and more than likely in the church as well. Indeed, given that the overall picture from the Corinthian correspondence is of a church following the values of secular Corinth rather than those of the cross, this view becomes more and more likely.[9] The picture that emerges is of a church where sophistic rhetoric is increasingly seen as the litmus test of authentic ministry. It

---

[8] See 3.2. above.

[9] See Thiselton, *1 Corinthians*, 40; and Savage, *Power through Weakness*, 186.

seems that certain speakers were exercising a form of leadership in the church by modelling the sought-after rhetorical excellence of the day. Bruce Winter notes, 'the sophists could have argued convincingly that if the secular *ekklēsia* ('church') of Corinth demanded of speakers a facility in oratory, then the *ekklēsia tou theou* ('church of God') in the same city should flourish with teachers of no less ability. Paul clearly lacked the necessary prowess.'[10] The Christians in Corinth were apparently used to measuring and comparing public performances; Paul was found wanting in a significant way.

Second, and in part related to the above, Corinth was a city dominated by the quest for image and status, a trend which had transferred into the life of the church. It has already been shown that the social fluidity in Corinth resulted in a concern for status, particularly on the part of those who had recently acquired wealth and influence.[11] This emphasis on social standing fed into a more general concern with self-promotion and image.[12] The image in question was one of strength, health and power; the statues of Caesar Augustus and his family which have been found in Corinth are fine examples of men exhibiting precisely this sort of self-promotion.[13] Together with every Roman city the city of Corinth valued success, power, beauty and strength, but in a more intense way; to achieve high status was to show each of these characteristics. It is easy to see why the sophistic speakers found a ready audience in Corinth; their rhetorical practice was centred on projecting a successful image of themselves and acquiring social status through their public speaking capability.[14] As a church which was 'walking in a secular way' (1 Cor 3:3, 5) and which looked favourably on sophistic speakers, it seems likely that the Christian

---

[10] Winter, *Philo and Paul*, 221.

[11] See 3.2.1. above.

[12] The Babbius monument has already been referred to as evidence for this trend.

[13] Winter, *After Paul Left Corinth*, xviii. Peter Jones makes an interesting comparison between Augustus' use of his own image in his political strategy and the practices of modern spin-doctors. Jones, "Augustus: Master of Spin".

[14] Hence why Favorinus was later to be so delighted at the erection of a statue of himself in the city library. See Winter, *Philo and Paul*, 132-137.

community in Corinth was similarly concerned with image and status; indeed, such may lie behind the way in which the 'super-apostles' were so readily welcomed by the church. They 'measured up' to canons of success much better than the weak and socially inferior Paul (2 Cor 10:10-18).

Third, the church in Corinth held to an over-realized eschatological world view which was linked to an 'enthusiastic' view of the Spirit. Comment has already been made on 1 Corinthians 4:8 and its indication, or otherwise, of an eschatology which fails to recognise the tensions which arise through living in a world of the 'not yet'.[15] I argued that Thiselton's original analysis of the situation, and his recent restatement of his position, makes considerable sense, especially when linked to the Corinthians' view of the Spirit (1 Cor 12-14) and their eager adoption of secular values.[16] Bearing all three tendencies in mind it is possible to reconstruct a situation in which the manifestations of the Spirit, which the Corinthians had seen, had persuaded some of them that the 'age to come' (which Paul had undoubtedly taught during his eighteen months in Corinth) had now arrived. This would have been welcome news for the Christians in secular Corinth for it enabled them to enjoy the sort of successful spiritual life that would echo the world view of their own city; indeed, perhaps the Corinthians' own cultural and philosophical background made them more disposed to adopt such an eschatological perspective. It is difficult to be certain, but a coherent picture emerges of a church influenced not only by sophistic rhetoric and a concern for image and status, but also an understanding that all (or nearly all) the future blessings of God can be enjoyed in the present power of the Spirit.[17]

---

[15] See 4.2.1. above.

[16] Thiselton, "Realized Eschatology at Corinth," ; and Thiselton, *1 Corinthians*, 39-41. See also confirmation by B.J. Oropeza, *Paul and Apostasy: Eschatology, Perseverance and Falling Away in the Corinthian Congregation*, Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 2. Reihe 115 (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 2000), 179-182.

[17] Such an assessment is not meant to underestimate the difference between the occasion of 1 and 2 Corinthians. Although there is no denying the different subject of the two epistles, it is inaccurate to suggest that the two letters are addressing a totally different set of problems (so

5.2.3. 2 Corinthians 10:10 and 11:6

> [10]For they say, "His letters are weighty and strong, but his bodily presence is weak and his speech contemptible."
>
> [6]I may be untrained in speech, but not in knowledge; certainly in every way and in all things we have made this evident to you.

The above section has argued that bearing in mind three particular aspects of the Corinthian context means that the foundations for assessing how Paul's audience might have responded to his news can be laid on firmer ground. Indeed, these can be strengthened still further by considering two verses which shed light on how Paul's general communication was received; although they do not relate directly to how his hardship narratives were read by the church, they do clarify important aspects of Paul's relationship with the Corinthian church.

In 2 Corinthians 10:10 Paul refers directly to a challenge that has been made about his communication, and seems to quote the actual words that had been used to criticise him, perhaps in a previous letter or an oral message. The heart of this challenge is that Paul's opponents see a dichotomy between Paul's letters, which are said to be 'weighty' and 'strong', and his personal presence and public speech which are both said to be deficient in certain ways. Of immediate interest to us here is the comment about Paul's letters themselves. The Greek terms *barus* ('weighty') and *ischuros* ('strong') can have a range of meanings, but one interpretation is that they refer to the rhetorical style of the letters rather than their content; following this approach Paul's detractors are thus arguing that although Paul claimed to reject

---

Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, *The Theology of the Second Letter to the Corinthians*, New Testament Theology (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 15-17). If the line taken by Thiselton and Winter is correct, namely that the underlying problem in the Corinthian church was the adoption of a secular value system in place of the cross, then the core issue addressed in 1 Corinthians has continuity with that addressed in 2 Corinthians. Indeed, Winter identifies the 'super-apostles' Paul critiques in 2 Corinthians 10-13 as adherents to the same sophistic tradition as that rejected in 1 Corinthians 1-4. See Winter, *Philo and Paul*, 137 and Thiselton, *1 Corinthians*, 33.

sophistic rhetoric (1 Cor 2:1-5) his letters actually betray the use of such rhetorical devices.[18] Whatever the case, this verse certainly makes clear that Paul's letters could not be, and were not, ignored by the Corinthians.

2 Corinthians 11:6 refers to another charge made against Paul, namely that he is *idiōtēs tō logō* ('untrained in speech'). It is likely that this phrase had initially been used critically of Paul, perhaps in a letter or oral message;[19] it seems at first glance that this term refers to Paul having had no formal training in rhetoric and public speaking. This reading is rendered problematic, however, by clear evidence of rhetorical skill in Paul's letters and his speeches recorded in Acts, together with what is known about Paul's upbringing. Paul shows rhetorical skill in the passages already examined in this study; furthermore, there are indications that Paul used rhetorical skill in structuring his letters.[20] Most importantly, it seems that the term *idiōtēs tō logō* is more fluid in meaning than might be imagined. Surveying its use by other ancient writers, Bruce Winter argues that the term has a range of meanings, including describing those trained in rhetoric but no longer earning a living from such training.[21] Thus Winter concludes, 'The meaning of the term *[idiōtēs tō logō]* as defined by Philodemus, Philo of Alexandria and Isocrates reflected the reality of Paul's educational status – trained in rhetoric but not living the professional life of a public orator and teacher, even though he engaged in public proclamation and private instruction.'[22] Paul is thus happy to use the phrase about himself but adds a sharply adversative statement which affirms his confidence in his ability to use rhetorical devices as and when necessary.

---

[18] Winter, *Philo and Paul*, 204-213.

[19] Barnett, *2 Corinthians*, 508.

[20] Betz, *Galatians* ; Witherington, *Conflict and Community in Corinth* . Ben Witherington argues convincingly elsewhere that Paul's education at the hands of Gamaliel and others would have equipped him with rhetorical skills which would have served him well both before and after his conversion. See Witherington, *Paul Quest*, 89-129; also Forbes, "Comparison, Self-Praise and Irony," 23-24.

[21] Winter, *Philo and Paul*, 213-218.

[22] Ibid., 218.

It is not appropriate to claim too much from these verses, not least because neither of these passages addresses the specific question of how Paul's news of his own hardship was received; nevertheless it is possible to draw out two points of particular relevance to an understanding of the relationship between Paul and his audience in respect to his communication. First, it is clear that Paul's audience was capable of being sharply critical of Paul's communicative behaviour; they felt no compunction about judging the apostle's writing and speaking according to their own canons of accepted excellence. As 10:10 and 11:6 both indicate, the criticisms were less about the content and more about the form and style of Paul's communication; if my assessment of the sophistic influence in the church is correct, this form of critique will be no surprise indeed. It is thus entirely possible that the believers in Corinth would receive Paul's news in a similar critical spirit; they were used to measuring and comparing communication, and Paul's news would be no exception. Second, these verses show that Paul was very mindful of the critical response which his communication received. It was not the case that the apostle thought that his writings would be welcomed uncritically by a loyal audience; he was fully aware of the criticisms levelled against him as a result of what he spoke and wrote. He was not writing into a vacuum; he was conscious that how he wrote was as important to his audience as what he wrote. As he wrote down the news which forms the focus of this study, he must have been aware of the impact the news would have.

5.3. How Paul's News Was Received

Bearing in mind the cultural background of the Corinthian church and the negative way in which Paul's general communication had already been measured by that church, it is possible to construct a likely response to Paul's hardship narratives. There is no reason to suppose that the negative reaction which had greeted Paul's previous communication (as evidenced by 10:10 and 11:6) would not be continued in the Corinthians' assessment of Paul's stories of his own afflictions. Indeed, as the

four aspects of Paul's hardship narratives are examined (Paul's physical hardship, emotional weakness, low social standing, and perseverance), together with the rhetorical tools that accompany them, it is easy to see particular reasons why each would have collided with the Corinthians' understanding of what news they wanted to hear, and thus met with a negative response.[23]

First, news of Paul's physical suffering is unlikely to have been welcomed by a community focussed on enjoying the blessings of the age of the Spirit. The way in which Paul draws attention, using on occasion the rhetorical device of repetition, to the ongoing nature of his physical hardship would not have tallied with the Corinthians' understanding of discipleship. Indeed the ironic contrasts of 1 Corinthians 4:8-13 indicates that Paul's emphasis on his own afflictions was in stark contrast to how the Corinthians understood their lifestyle as followers of Jesus Christ. They were living as spiritual kings (4:8) while Paul was reminding them of the hard labour of a condemned man (4:9). Through his reporting of the cost of discipleship Paul was challenging the Corinthians' assumption that the future blessings of God could really be experienced in the present; the litany of afflictions in 2 Corinthians 11:23-33 would probably have induced in the Corinthians considerable discomfort. This was not news they expected from an apostolic leader of the church; Paul's physical hardship must have seemed to belong to the age that was past and not the age that the Corinthians were currently enjoying.

Second, reports of the impact on Paul's emotional weakness would have jarred with a church which prized human strength and fortitude. Leaders in society were

---

[23] It is, of course, possible that some of Paul's news would have been welcomed. In 2 Corinthians 1:8-11 the apostle clearly expects that the news of his rescue from his trial in Asia will comfort and encourage the Corinthian readers, not least because their own role in praying for the apostle was explicitly acknowledged (v11). For the Corinthian believers who lived in a city full of status-anxiety, the fact that their prayers played a part in Paul's rescue from suffering is likely to have been welcome news. This seems the only example, however, where a positive response is likely; the evidence for a negative response seems overwhelming.

meant to exhibit strength and power, and this was clearly valued in the Corinthian church.[24] Instead Paul seems to be boasting in all the wrong things, namely human weakness (2 Cor 11:30): instead of showing fortitude in the face of hardship he admits to feelings of depression (2 Cor 1:8-9); in almost every passage he reports feeling near death (e.g. 2 Co 4:10-11). Instead of focusing on his own emotional strength in the face of adversity he always points to God as the reason for carrying on (2 Cor 4:7); the picture is of a weak man who cannot keep himself going but has to rely on God (2 Cor 1:9). This would surely have dismayed the Corinthians; such a leader could not be respected within the city or the church. Paul could not be held up as a model of Christian leadership to compete with the secular leaders whose statues could be seen in Corinth, or the athletes who were so feted at the Isthmian games. A statue of the apostle Paul as seen in his hardship narratives, weak and afflicted, would have been an embarrassment to the church to whom he was writing. For Paul to boast in such things was insulting to a church which expected more from its leader, and he was certainly no leader in whom a church could boast, as was Paul's hope (2 Cor 5:12).

Third, the emphasis in Paul's news on his humiliation and low social-standing is likely to have been offensive to the status-seeking community in Corinth. Public recognition was a widely held goal in Corinth, and that Paul was sharing news which so decisively stressed his low social standing (1 Cor 4:10) would have been unwelcome. The strong images which depict Paul's social humiliation would have been shocking to Paul's audience (1 Cor 4:9, 13); the story of Paul's embarrassing escape from Damascus would have confused the Christian community (2 Cor 11:32-33): why is Paul reporting news which makes him look so bad?[25] Given that Paul has been judged not to come up to the mark expected of visiting speakers (2 Cor

---

[24] Clarke, *Secular and Christian Leadership in Corinth*, 41-57.

[25] They would certainly have been confused in the light of Paul's hope that they could boast about him (2 Cor 5:12); such a litany of woe and humiliation gave them nothing to preach about.

11:6), that he emphasised news which further diminished his own reputation would probably have baffled the church which wanted, above all things, to acquire a good image for itself in successful Corinth.[26]

Fourth, it is probable that the focus on perseverance in the face of future hope would have been unsettling to a community which believed the future was already present. Paul's use of the antithesis to structure his depiction of his present Christian lifestyle would not have echoed with the Corinthians' experience; they were living in the 'already', and did not recognise the eschatological tension to which Paul is alluding. According to the Corinthian world view, Christian living was about enjoying the present blessings of God in all their fullness, not making do with the grace to persevere in challenging times (2 Cor 6: 8-10). Paul's emphasis on news which emphasised that which still had to be consummated is likely to have been greeted very cautiously by his audience.

More generally, it is possible to imagine that the Corinthians might have judged Paul's communicative method harshly for two equal and opposite reasons. On the one hand the rhetorical skills that Paul did use could have been used in turn against him. Paul's employment of irony, paradox, imagery and repetition could have been seized on as further proof that Paul could write skilful letters but was still a deficient speaker (cf. 2 Cor 10:10). The argument would carry on, moreover, that Paul was unable to keep to his own disavowal of rhetorical inventions (cf. 1 Cor 2:1-5); these fine pieces of news handling were evidence that he said one thing and did another.[27] On the other hand the fact that Paul's rhetorical skills did not extend to the sort of sophistic practices so favoured in Corinth showed that Paul was effectively disqualified as a leader of that church. He seemed unable to share news

---

[26] Paul's emphasis on his own human weakness also reflected badly on the Corinthians; if Paul was the 'scum of the world', what did that say about the church he had planted?

[27] See the discussion in section 5.5. below on a similar charge formulated by certain contemporary Pauline scholars.

about himself in a way that projected a positive image of himself and made his audience feel good about themselves. His news was framed in an unsettling and challenging way; he was not up to the level of rhetorical skill needed for a communicator in Corinth.

5.4. A Theological Choice

Notwithstanding the provisionalities of such an approach, a coherent picture has emerged of the Corinthian church receiving Paul's news of his own hardship in a negative way.[28] The stories of physical suffering, human weakness, social humiliation and patient perseverance would have collided with the Corinthians' understanding of what the Christian life was about and thus what was news worth sharing. According to their understanding Paul was sharing news about all the wrong things; indeed it is likely that the Corinthians would have been suspicious of Paul's motives, discomforted by his ironic tone, offended by his challenge to their own values and critical of his performance as a communicator and an apostle. Paul's stories did not make the audience feel good about themselves and thus he transgressed one of the main tenets of sophistic practice.

Such a reconstruction of the Corinthians' response also makes sense from a theological perspective. I have argued that Paul's hardship narratives are informed on a fundamental level by his theology of the cross; he shares news which is consistent with his settled pattern of ministry to the Corinthian church (1 Cor 2:1-5). If Thiselton's analysis of the underlying issue in 1 Corinthians – that the

---

[28] To put it as baldly as has been done above may be to overstate the case. It is possible that Paul's news about his own suffering was received less critically than I have suggested. Perhaps Paul's emphasis on the cruciform nature of his ministry might have pricked the consciences of his readers and caused some to reflect on their own world views and value systems. Perhaps they also felt sorry for Paul and were glad to be reminded of the cost of faithful Christian living. Ralph Martin suggests that a future visit of Paul to Corinth was a success (Martin, *2 Corinthians*, xvi), but this is far from certain; it seems instead reasonable to assume that the immediate reaction of the Corinthian Christians to news of Paul's suffering was in line with their secular surroundings and previous practice, and thus continued their negative assessment of Paul and his communication.

community's value system was over-influenced by secular trends and under-influenced by the cross of Christ – is correct (and I believe it is and is substantially true for 2 Corinthians as well), then it is entirely consistent that the Corinthians should struggle with news that was so thoroughly informed by a theology of the cross.[29] While it is probably the case that they found the stories of physical suffering challenging, the tales of human weakness embarrassing, the reports of social humiliation offensive and the narratives of patient perseverance perplexing, it is more important to recognise that such a reaction reflected a fundamentally different theological world view to the one that they espoused. Thiselton describes this as a 'contrast between a Corinthian *theologia gloriae*, centred on experiences, beliefs and the church, and Paul's *theologia crucis*, centred on the cross and Christ.'[30]

This theological perspective on the Corinthian reception reveals deeper issues in Paul's communicative choices. It is almost certain that Paul would have been aware of the negative reaction his hardship narratives would evoke; he knew that such news would challenge, unsettle and probably offend the Corinthians, especially as he returned to it more than once in his letters. It is also the case that it would have been easy for Paul to share news that would have been received more warmly; his apostolic ministry had been remarkable enough thus far to supply him with a number of stories which would have chimed in with the successful mood of the Corinthian church.[31] However, because sharing news for Paul was part of his communicative strategy which was itself informed by his theology of the cross, the stories he decided to tell – and the way he told them – were decided not by what the audience wanted to hear but by the gospel Paul wanted to preach. Paul was neither

---

[29] Thiselton, *1 Corinthians*, 33, 40.

[30] Ibid., 368.

[31] This possibility is illustrated by Paul's reporting of his 'visions and revelations' in 2 Corinthians 12:1-10. Paul hints at what he might have to share, but then refuses to do so (v4), focusing instead on the thorn that illustrates his weakness (v7). One can only imagine how frustrated the Corinthians were at Paul's failure to expand on exactly the sort of news they wanted.

ignorant of, nor impervious to, the reaction his news would have, but he did not let this alter the theological course he had set himself; his focus on the cross of Christ as a mark of Christian living and community determined the choices he made about the news he would share, and this emphasis was more important than the reception his news had. Paul was prepared to carry the cost of audience disapproval because to pursue the alternative, namely tailor his news to suit his audience, would be to abandon his overall communicative strategy and thus undermine the integrity of his cross-centred message. The strong indication from the above reception analysis is that Paul knew his news was not what the audience wanted to hear, but it was news *he* wanted to share, because those stories, together with the way he shared them, embodied the gospel of Christ and him crucified.

5.5. A Hermeneutic of Suspicion

5.5.1. Introduction

Before we end this present discussion, however, and proceed with wider conclusions about Paul's communicative choices to the church in Corinth, it is valuable to pause and consider how such a reading of these particular texts might appear in the light of other possible readings. Hitherto, the light shed on Paul has been a favourable one; the focus has been to understand how Paul expresses his communicative aims and then assess the extent to which the hardship narratives were consistent with those aims. In addition, the present chapter has considered how such news of suffering might have been received; here a note of negativity has been heard, but concerning the probable reaction of the Corinthian church to Paul's news rather than in the direction of the apostle himself. Such an approach may be consistent with the terms set out at the beginning of this study, but it runs the risk of failing to engage with some of the questions which are raised in contemporary studies of Paul. A number of studies have attempted to shed light on Paul's

writings by adopting a more critical, or suspicious, approach to the apostle's work.[32] This approach, often characterised as a 'hermeneutic of suspicion', has resulted in some stimulating conclusions. Adopting such an approach for this study would involve considering whether it was possible to see Paul and his communicative behaviour in a less favourable light. To use a phrase which has been asked of me in the course of this research project, is the apostle Paul not in fact a 'master of spin' himself? In his own handling of news is he not guilty of what he claims to be avoiding, namely the excesses of rhetoric for audience effect?

In this section I will engage, necessarily briefly, with these questions and the hermeneutic from which they arise. First, I will outline the broad trends of a hermeneutic of suspicion before considering its impact on this present study.

5.5.2. A Hermeneutic of Suspicion Outlined

It would be inaccurate to describe a hermeneutic of suspicion as a scholarly approach which is monochrome in character; there is considerable diversity among those scholars who approach Paul in this way. However, for the purposes of this study it is possible to identify three steps which, when taken, form the basis to a hermeneutic of suspicion.[33]

The first step is the recognition of how extensively Paul uses rhetorical structures and techniques in his writing. This trend has already been identified and examined

---

[32] Antoinette Clark Wire, *The Corinthian Women Prophets: A Reconstruction through Paul's Rhetoric* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 4; Hans-Michael Wünsch, *Der paulinische Brief 2Kor 1-9 als kommunikative Handlung. Eine rhetorisch-literaturwissenschaftliche Untersuchung* (Münster: Lit, 1996); Elizabeth A Castelli, *Imitating Paul: A Discourse of Power* (Louisville, Ky: Westminster/John Knox, 1991); also an earlier study Graham Shaw, *The Cost of Authority: Manipulation and Freedom in the New Testament* (London: SCM Press, 1983).

[33] See a valuable discussion on the hermeneutic of suspicion in Frances Young and David F. Ford, *Meaning and Truth in 2 Corinthians* (London: SPCK, 1987) 158-161. This is not to say that all those referred to below would all associate themselves with such an attitude to Pauline research, but they have contributed to the general climate in which such a hermeneutic has flourished.

in the previous chapter, and I will not seek to demonstrate it further here. Rhetorical analyses of Paul's letters abound, and share the assumption that an understanding of the apostle's writings can be enhanced by an appreciation of the significant extent to which, knowingly or unknowingly, the apostle drew on prevailing rhetorical models for the structure of his epistolary correspondence.[34]

Second, following from the identification of a clear rhetorical structure and technique, it is argued that Paul's letters should best be understood as attempts to persuade. That is to say, the texts are not simply timeless expressions of truth, nor testaments to Paul's ideology, nor documents of pastoral communication, but rather a sustained attempt to engage and persuade Paul's hearers of a particular view or position.[35] In an important study on the Corinthian women prophets Antoinette Clark Wire writes 'all argument serves the function of persuasion.'[36] She takes as her starting assumption that everything Paul writes in 1 Corinthians (the focus of her study) is part of the apostle's effort to persuade; of particular relevance to this study is her assertion that this includes Paul's own reflection on his own speaking and how it is received. More broadly it is recognised that Paul has certain aims in writing to the Corinthian church (even if there is little agreement about what this aims are), and that he uses his rhetorical skill to advance those aims.[37] Part of the task for the scholar engaging in a hermeneutic of suspicion is to identify which of those aims are hidden and how they might be revealed. The task here is thus to uncover what is going on beneath the surface of the text, to ascertain what the rhetorical structure reveals about Paul's motives in writing as he does. The assumption is that all is not as it seems.

---

[34] For a thorough summary of the rhetorical strategies employed by the apostle Paul see Mitchell, *Paul and the Rhetoric of Reconciliation: An Exegetical Investigation of the Language and Composition of 1 Corinthians* esp. 36-42; also Witherington, *Conflict and Community in Corinth*

[35] For a recent article which illustrates this approach see Wanamaker, "A Rhetoric of Power: Ideology and 1 Corinthians 1-4," 115-137.

[36] Wire, *Corinthian Women Prophets*, 3.

[37] Martin, *The Corinthian Body*, 47-67; Wünsch, *Der paulinische Brief*; Wanamaker, "A Rhetoric of Power: Ideology and 1 Corinthians 1-4," ; Castelli, *Imitating Paul*, 122-123.

Third, it is a view held by some (but not all) scholars in this field that the aims Paul has are determined by the community to which he is writing. That is to say, because every part of Paul's writing is an attempt to persuade his audience, it is said to follow that if he seeks to address a particular issue it is because that is an area of controversy within the community to which he writes. Indeed, the more intensely he argues a particular point, the more critical an issue this was likely to have been in the local church.[38] The content of Paul's writing is driven, therefore, not by a predetermined theological pattern but by the particular concerns of the Christians with whom he was corresponding. Thus it becomes possible to reconstruct the character of Paul's opponents through a mirror-reading of how the apostle responds to their concerns.[39] The picture that often results is of a struggle between two understandings of the Christian faith and life; adopting a hermeneutic of suspicion means that there is no assumption that the view espoused by the apostle Paul has any more validity than that of his opponents.[40] A hermeneutic of suspicion is, therefore, an approach which believes that there is a lot more going on in Paul's letters than meets the eye, and that an analysis of the rhetorical techniques Paul uses to persuade can open up what his aims are in writing and how they reflect the concerns of the local community.[41]

---

[38] Wire, *Corinthian Women Prophets*, 4

[39] This is the approach adopted by Wire and others; see however a critique of this approach in Witherington, *Conflict and Community in Corinth*, 231.

[40] Wire, *Corinthian Women Prophets*, 10-11; Wünsch, *Der paulinische Brief*, 9.

[41] Alongside this approach it is also argued that placing Paul in a canonical context results in an approach to the apostle that does not appreciate the rhetorical, persuasive purpose of his letters and thus the essence of what Paul is really about. Furthermore, such an approach does not afford sufficient latitude for the reader to be unpersuaded by Paul's arguments; Wire argues that respect for biblical authority 'presupposes that Paul is right and excludes the possibility of weighing his arguments in the balance.' In order to avoid a flat reading of the text that pays insufficient attention to the rhetorical particularities, it is necessary to separate the apostle Paul's letters from their canonical location. For more see Wire, *Corinthian Women Prophets*, 9-11 and Wünsch, *Der paulinische Brief*, 7-9.

5.5.3. A Hermeneutic of Suspicion Considered

In assessing how a hermeneutic of suspicion might inform our own reading of Paul, it will be helpful to address each of the three steps identified above in turn, before suggesting some wider conclusions which may be drawn.

First, although this study is not a thoroughgoing rhetorical analysis of the Corinthian hardship narratives, it has recognised the considerable range of rhetorical tools which the apostle Paul employs in this part of his oeuvre.[42] The view that Paul writes with considerable rhetorical skill is thus one espoused both by this study and those who adopt a hermeneutic of suspicion. It is true that I have not sought to locate the hardship narratives within Paul's overall rhetorical structure, but that does not mean that I have neglected their immediate rhetorical context or suggested Paul is writing without a rhetorical overview. Furthermore, that I argued that it was far from certain how consciously Paul used prevailing rhetorical models does not mean that I imagined his writing to be free of rhetorical influence; it is simply stating that, while Paul clearly had considerable rhetorical skill, we cannot always be certain which exact models he was drawing on and to what extent.

Second, I would agree that Paul has clear aims in writing, and that his rhetorical skills are marshalled towards fulfilling these aims. It has not been my argument that the hardship narratives are news stories reported by Paul in a vacuum; they are best understood as part of a deliberate strategy on the part of the apostle to persuade the Corinthians of certain errors which Paul believes they hold. It was my contention in chapter three that the core problem which Paul saw himself addressing was a church over-influenced by the patterns of the secular world (cf. 1 Cor 3:3) and under-influenced by the nature of God reflected in the cross of Christ. I suggested that it was this problem that was at the root of the Corinthians' internal difficulties and their troubled relationship with Paul. In particular, as I discussed in chapter

---

[42] See chapter four above.

four, it was this worldview that had resulted in the negative assessment made by some in Corinth of the apostle and his ministry, and a concomitant high estimation of those teachers whose lives conformed more to the spirit of ancient Corinth. In this context Paul's hardship narratives are properly seen as part of a deliberate effort to rebuke the Corinthians and encourage them to see that faithful living is not about victorious narratives of success but a life and ministry conforming to the cross of Christ. In recounting tales of his suffering Paul is attempting to reaffirm his authenticity as an apostle, a matter which was clearly under serious question in the Corinthian church. Paul's hardship narratives, therefore, are not simply stories reported to add human interest but rather part of a deliberate strategy on the part of the apostle to persuade the Corinthians to conform their own lives and view of ministry to the cross of Christ.[43]

Third, it can also be acknowledged that Paul's aims in writing were significantly shaped by the audience to whom he was writing; here there would be considerable correlation with a hermeneutic of suspicion. It is in this area, however, where there is greater complexity than scholars such as Wire and Castelli allow. It is true that, as I have argued above, Paul's reportage of suffering is inspired to a great extent by the misunderstandings he perceived in the Corinthian church, but it would be inaccurate to suggest that this explains all the motivation behind Paul's writing. I have argued consistently in this thesis that it is makes sense of the text as a whole to locate a much deeper motivation at work. For Paul, while the *occasion* for the reporting of his suffering was the Corinthian church and his correspondence with them, the *meaning* of his suffering was derived not from the Corinthian church but his own understanding of the work of God in Jesus Christ. There is a giveness about his cruciform news that is independent of the Corinthian errors, and that giveness is the cross of Jesus Christ (1 Cor 2:1-5). It is not true to say, therefore, that

---

[43] For a contrasting view from a scholar taking a much more sceptical approach to Paul see Shaw, *Cost of Authority*, 62-125. He maintains that Paul is trying to make a virtue of his own suffering and using it as a tool to exercise power over the Corinthian church.

Paul's hardship narratives were driven exclusively by his audience; the evidence suggests that they were driven on a more fundamental level by the apostle's theological understanding of God revealed in the crucified Jesus Christ.

An understanding of the hardship narratives which sees them simply as an attempt by the apostle to make the Corinthians feel sorry for him fails, I would argue, to take sufficient recognition of the overall theological agenda which Paul espouses in the letter. Were Paul to have been primarily concerned with popularity or success he could have positioned himself alongside the sophistic trend of the day and reported stories of church-planting, miracles and conversions. Instead, as we have seen, he explicitly rejects sophistic patterns of communication, not because they would not play well in the Corinthian context (there is every indication that they would) but because they would run counter to his settled theological message.[44]

5.5.4. Paul: A Master of Spin?

In the light of the above discussion it is possible to make some brief observations on whether Paul, in handling news about his own suffering as he does, can be described as a 'master of spin'. If the charge has yet to be so framed by a scholar adopting a hermeneutic of suspicion, it is consistent with that approach. The assumption is that Paul's aims are not what they seem, and that he is communicating in an artificially self-deprecating way in order to persuade the Corinthians to return their loyalty to him and his teaching.[45] Under this view it

---

[44] It is, of course, possible to argue that this theological message was itself merely a rhetorical construct designed to serve Paul's wider aim of reasserting his authority in the Corinthian church. This would be the logical conclusion of a hermeneutic of suspicion. However, notwithstanding the lack of integrity it impugns to the apostle, there are a number of other problems with this approach. Chiefly it requires that the understanding of the cross as power in weakness is not dealt with elsewhere, and that the hardship narratives which testify to this doctrine are peculiar to the Corinthian correspondence. Philippians 2:5-11 would suggest that the former is not true, Philippians 1:12-14 the latter.

[45] For an example of this line of discussion (employed before 'spin' acquired current usage) see Shaw, *Cost of Authority*, 122-123.

would follow to take a much more critical view of Paul as someone who said one thing but ultimately did another.[46]

Does our study, however, reveal a Paul who can be fairly described as a master of spin? The answer is that Paul may be a master of communication, but not of spin. For while our study has revealed a man with the whole range of rhetorical tools at his disposal, and with clear aims about what he wanted his communication to achieve, it also uncovers a writer who eschews those very things that would have chimed in with the sophistic mood of the day (and which would mark him out as a master of spin in today's terminology). To return to the marks of spin identified at the start of this thesis: the stories Paul shares are apparently not ones his audience would want to hear (the Corinthians appear to have relished stories of success, not apostles having to flee cities in baskets); his concern for his own social standing is limited, restricted only to his authenticity as an apostle (cf. 1 Cor 4:10); he deliberately prioritises content over form, both in theory and in practice (the cross of Christ over and against rhetorical brilliance); and he consciously seeks to be honest with the Corinthians about his own weakness as an apostle (2 Cor 12:5). In short, if Paul was trying to be a success in sophistic terms, he failed; as a model for a master of spin, he does not reach the mark. All of this is not to suggest that Paul was a naive communicator who delivered the first stories that came into his head. The apostle Paul, as evidenced in the hardship narratives, was a careful and capable communicator who knew what he was doing when he spoke and wrote as he did. The evidence from the text, read against the Corinthian communicative context, is that Paul was communicating in a way that was distinct to the prevailing culture of the day and thereby avoiding the charge of conforming to rhetoric focussed around

---

[46] This is effectively the position taken by Ralph P. Martin in his study of 1 Corinthians. Martin, *The Corinthian Body*, 47-48.

winning admiration and applause.[47] Gifted rhetorician he may have been, but the evidence must lead us to conclude that the apostle Paul was no master of spin.

5.5.5. Summary

There has not been space to adopt a thoroughgoing hermeneutic of suspicion with regard to the present study; that must remain a topic for future research. Nevertheless, our brief survey of contemporary studies which adopt this approach has been instructive in highlighting two key aspects of Paul's communicative behaviour. First, Paul is handling news with a clear purpose in mind; these are not stories he is sharing for the sake of it but because they fit in with his overall communicative purpose. This finding echoes the approach of a hermeneutic of suspicion and reinforces the value in studying Paul and the communicative choices he makes. Furthermore, it is important to note that it has not been necessary to divorce Paul's writings from their canonical context in order to pursue a critical line of enquiry. The dichotomy between a canonical reading of texts as necessarily flat and a rhetorical reading of texts as intrinsically critical is surely a false one. It is possible to recognise that certain texts carry with them particular authority because of their place in the canon of scripture without adopting a pre-critical line of enquiry into the meaning of the text itself. I have demonstrated that a canonical approach to 1 and 2 Corinthians can involve rigorous engagement with the historical particularity of their writing, the characteristics of the community to which they were addressed, and the aims of the human author involved. That I have been content to examine Paul on his own terms does not mean the engagement has been a simplistic one.[48]

---

[47] Ben Witherington highlights the difference between the *res gestae* of Caesar Augustus (identified by one classical scholar as the 'Master of Spin' - see Jones, "Augustus: Master of Spin,") and the longest hardship narrative of the apostle Paul (2 Cor 11:22-12:10).[47] Augustus records his achievements and concludes with the acclamation he has received from the Roman people; Paul lists his hardships and the worry he feels for others. Witherington argues that the Corinthians would have recognised the passage as the parody it was intended to be. Witherington, *Conflict and Community in Corinth*, 451-452.

[48] For more see Young and Ford, *Meaning and Truth*, 160-162.

Second, the survey has served to remind us of the value of keeping in mind the primacy of Paul as theologian. Those adopting a hermeneutic of suspicion see Paul primarily as a political figure, trying to bring order to a dysfunctional organisation and regain power for himself. In this context it is easy to see why the charge of being a 'master of spin' might seem to stick. Yet this position has some significant shortcomings when it comes to taking the text as a whole. For while there are clearly important questions of authority tied up in 1 and 2 Corinthians, the evidence from this study so far suggests that these are subservient to the wider theological agenda that drove Paul the apostle. The most obvious reading of the Corinthian texts under discussion is that Paul's communicative choices are informed by his overarching theological agenda rather than any purely political concern for his authority within the Corinthian church. Moreover, the most satisfactory explanation for the hardship narratives is that, faced with a church which was confused by its identity, Paul returned to the stories which most closely echoed his calling as a faithful apostle, that is, those stories which reflected a cruciform life. In sharing these stories Paul was deliberately positioning himself against those who rhetoric was aimed at winning applause and support.

While a hermeneutic of suspicion does serve as a useful reminder that Paul's letters are examples of rhetoric marshalled for specific reasons, in the final analysis it does not help explore in great depth what those reasons were. At the very least, it makes poor work of assessing Paul on the terms he sets up for himself, namely as a communicator of 'Christ and him crucified.' Failure to recognise Paul as theologian turns him into a very reactive figure, simply dealing with situations of political expediency. Such a figure would have much less to contribute to a theological critique of contemporary news handling. More importantly for scholarship on Paul, it falls short of a serious engagement with the apostle and his mission.

5.6. Conclusions

In this chapter I have argued that, despite the paucity of available data concerning the Corinthians' response to Paul's hardship narratives, it is possible to reconstruct a set of reactions that they are likely to have had. I suggested that, given the Corinthian context in which status was so prized, and sophistic rhetoric so respected, together with a level of over-realized eschatology within the church and hints of how Paul's previous communication had been judged, it was likely that Paul's news of personal weakness and suffering would have received a negative response from his audience. This response is likely to have included feelings of disappointment, confusion, offence and judgement, and Paul was no doubt aware that this would be the case. Nevertheless, I maintain that the fact that Paul shares news of personal hardship despite the probably negative audience response further illustrates the fact that for the apostle news was not just a practical activity which could be tailored to audience needs but an expression of an unchanging theological focus on the cross of Christ. An assessment of Paul's communicative choices from the perspective of a hermeneutic of suspicion enabled us to affirm the strengths of that approach, but also to emphasise that, while Paul was seeking to persuade his Corinthian audience, his communication was shaped on the most fundamental level by the cross of Christ and not by audience popularity. Given the similarities between the Corinthian and contemporary contexts, such a conclusion suggests interesting points of challenge to today's Christian communicators who have to consider the needs of the audience. It is with the nature of this challenge that the second half of this thesis is concerned.

PART B THE APOSTLE PAUL AND CONTEMPORARY NEWS HANDLING

6. PAUL'S NEWS AND TODAY'S NEWS: A THEOLOGICAL-EMPIRICAL FRAMEWORK

6.1. Introduction

The present chapter forms a bridge between the two halves of this study. The first half of this thesis comprised an exploration of the theological framework which the apostle Paul used in his handling of news to the Corinthian church; this chapter will reflect on and summarise the findings of this analysis and suggest the key questions that Paul's example poses to contemporary Christian communicators. The second half of this thesis is concerned with examining how Paul's theology of news might enable a critique to be made of contemporary Christian news handling; with this in mind this chapter will also outline the methodological framework in which this critique can take place, focusing particularly on the choices I have made in pursuing a certain form of empirical research. Finally, I will describe the way ahead and explain how the apostle Paul's challenge to contemporary communicators might be heard.

6.2. Paul's Theological Model: Cruciform News

6.2.1. Cruciform News: A Summary

Thus far my argument with respect to the apostle Paul has been as follows. In chapter two I argued that the apostle Paul has a distinctive contribution to make to a theological understanding of news handling. His ministry was exercised in an environment dominated by rhetoric, and his world was one shaped by the giving and receiving of news, a practice of vital importance to the early Christian communities. Given a broad definition of news it is possible trace some similarity between news in the first century and that today. Furthermore, through a

taxonomical study I showed that Paul himself shared a range of news stories in his letters, but that one type of news story – that of his own suffering – dominated his correspondence, especially to the church in Corinth. It was this group of passages that I suggested would be most fruitful for more detailed study.

In chapter three I sought to understand how the apostle Paul saw his role as a communicator. Through a survey of cultural influences in ancient Corinth I argued that Paul was working in a very complex communicative environment, both because of the presence in Corinth of sophistic speakers and also because of the Corinthian Christians' tendency to critique Paul according to the secular conventions of their age. I then suggested that 1 Corinthians 2:1-5 could be read as Paul's communicative manifesto to the Corinthian church and argued that the passage does not imply that Paul rejected all forms of rhetorical technique, but rather the 'secondary' rhetoric that was so popular in Corinth at that time and was being practised by the sophistic teachers. Nevertheless, I concluded that these verses point towards a model of communication in which all communicative choices, including the use or otherwise of basic rhetorical structures, are placed in an overall theological framework based on the crucified Christ. The cross of Christ determines both the message and the method of Paul's preaching; I suggested that the phrase 'cruciform communication' is an appropriate summary of Paul's approach as described in these verses and can refer not only to Paul's communicative behaviour when he first preached to the Corinthians but also to his ongoing understanding of preaching and writing to that early Christian community.

Chapter four comprised an analysis of the content and form of five hardship narratives from 1 and 2 Corinthians, with the question in mind as to whether this example of Pauline communication cohered with the theological model Paul had described in 1 Corinthians 2:1-5. I suggested that all four aspects of Paul's news – his physical suffering, emotional and human weakness, social humiliation and patient perseverance – were informed by Paul's theology of the cross, which

determined that weakness was the place where God's power was to be seen, physical hardship was a sign of walking the way of Christ, low social standing was the result of adopting a fundamentally different value system, and abiding in the face of adversity was a true reflection of the eschatological reality that the coming kingdom had yet to be consummated. It was thus my conclusion that there is both an internal and external consistency in Paul's handling of news. The internal consistency is to be found in the way in which both the content and form of Paul's hardship narratives are shaped by the same theological paradigm, namely the cross of Christ; the external consistency is to be seen in the fact that the cross plays as pivotal a role in Paul's news handling as it does in his overall communicative manifesto. I concluded that it was possible to speak of Paul's hardship narratives as an example of 'cruciform news', that is, news which is shaped on every level by the cross of Christ.

In chapter five I analysed the reception which Paul's news might have received from his Corinthian audience. Notwithstanding the shortage of specific information concerning how the Corinthians responded to Paul's letters, I suggested that it was possible to recreate with a degree of certainty the feelings of Paul's audience as they read of his hardship. I argued that, given the Corinthian context in which status was so prized and sophistic rhetoric so respected, together with a level of over-realized eschatology within the church and hints of how Paul's previous communication had been judged, it was likely that Paul's news of personal weakness and suffering would have received a negative response from his audience. This response is likely to have included feelings of disappointment, confusion, offence and judgement, and Paul was no doubt aware that this would be the case. Nevertheless, I maintained that the fact that Paul shares news of personal hardship, despite the probably negative audience response, further illustrates the fact that for the apostle news was not just a practical activity which could be tailored to audience needs but an expression of an unchanging theological focus on the cross of Christ. A review of a

hermeneutic of suspicion indicated that the most natural reading of the texts in question confirmed this approach.

It is, therefore, my overall conclusion that Paul's hardship narratives represent a model of news that might justifiably be described as cruciform. Paul shares news which reflects his theology of the cross, a theology which sees the death of Christ not only as the locus for God's powerful and saving activity in the world (1 Cor 1:18) but also as the pattern of authentic Christian discipleship (2 Cor 1:5; 4:10). As Barnett comments on 2 Corinthians 4:7, 'in Paul's mind the proclaimer must reflect the proclaimed. He who proclaims a crucified Messiah must himself live cruciform.'[1] As 1 Corinthians 1-4 makes clear, for Paul the cross was not simply a one-off historical salvific event but also an ongoing sign, both of the way God works in the world (bringing power in weakness, in the midst of a world which has yet to be fully healed), and also the way faithful followers are to demonstrate their discipleship (in costly living and a re-evaluation of worldly status and reputation).[2] It is this *theologia crucis* that leads Paul to share stories of physical suffering, human weakness, public humiliation and patient endurance, even though such stories were deeply distasteful to his Corinthian audience. Thus this category of news – not the only, but the most prevalent category in the Pauline corpus – is to be understood at its deepest level as an expression of the gospel of Christ and him crucified (1 Cor

---

[1] Barnett, *2 Corinthians*, 232.

[2] In emphasising Paul's theology of the cross (and omitting extensive reflection on the resurrection) I recognise that there is a proper sense in which the cross and the resurrection belong together in the apostle's thought (e.g. 1 Cor 15:3-8). It is certainly true, as Cousar argues, that Paul's understanding of the power of the cross is firmly rooted in the reality of the resurrection; without the resurrection the cross makes no sense at all (Cousar, *Theology of the Cross*, 88-108). Nevertheless, it is also true, as Cousar suggests, that Paul, on occasions, chooses to make one the focal point of his theological argument without the other being mentioned (Cousar, *Theology of the Cross*, 105). Such is his practice in 1 Corinthians 2:1-5 and as this was the focus of my study it has been appropriate to interpret the hardship narratives from the perspective of the cross. For an approach to 2 Corinthians 1:8-11 which emphasises the resurrection see Wright, *Resurrection*, 300-302.

2:2); it is an example of cruciform news.[3] As Cousar suggests, 'these autobiographical reflections are not to be understood merely as the exclusive experiences of one unusual Christian or only as raw data for constructing a biography of Paul. Instead, the experiences are reported and function as a paradigm, to illustrate how the preaching of the crucified Christ is to work itself out in the life and service of every 'ordinary' Christian.'[4]

6.2.2. The Nature of a Pauline Critique

If these hardship narratives demonstrate Paul displaying a coherent and cruciform theology of news, it still remains to be seen how this might inform a critique of contemporary news handling. It would certainly be an error to suggest that a Pauline contribution to this form of communication should take the form of certain practical principles which can be easily transferred from one context to another; to suggest, for example, that Christians engaged in handling news should simply be inspired by Paul to include more stories of personal and corporate suffering and care a little less about what the audience thinks, would be to neglect the case which I have made that Paul's communicative choices are borne not out of practical expediency but theological conviction. An engagement with this aspect of the communicative practice of Paul must take place at a theological level, because it is on that level that Paul's communicative choices are made.

The contribution of Paul to a critique of contemporary news handling is thus to provide a profound and authoritative theological framework against which present-

---

[3] It is important to be clear what I am not claiming here. I am not arguing that *all* Paul's news can be described as cruciform; I have only examined one (albeit the most prevalent) category. It would be an interesting study to look again at the other categories of news with a cruciform model in mind, but there is no space for such an undertaking here. Similarly, I am not suggesting that a perspective of news is the only standpoint from which to examine Paul's hardship narratives; there are many more things going on in these complex passages than Paul sharing stories with his audience. Nevertheless, examining these passages in the light of 1 Corinthians 2:1-5 has still proved a valid and fruitful approach.

[4] Cousar, *Theology of the Cross*, 136.

day communicative practice can be measured;[5] the depth to which Paul's theology of the cross informs his news handling means that his example can function as a powerful tool with which to assess modern news handling. The remainder of this study will thus be focussed on analysing how Paul's theology of cruciform news compares with the theological assumptions behind news sharing undertaken by Christians in the present age on both a professional and non-professional basis. To ask how Paul's theological model of news might inform the practice of Christians engaged in handling stories about themselves and the church is not the only question that should be asked of their communicative behaviour; their activity may be viewed from a number of different important perspectives. It is the conclusion of this half of the thesis, however, that to engage in a critique based on Paul's example of cruciform news is to draw on a canonical resource for theological reflection that has been previously undervalued and yet which has considerable potential to offer profound insight and challenge into an activity of substantial importance in today's church.

6.3. Critiquing Contemporary News Handling: An Empirical Methodology

6.3.1. Introduction

There is, however, an important question which remains to asked: what data is going to be the subject of such a Pauline critique? That there needs to be some data at all is determined by the shape of this study; the overall task I set myself was not simply to analyse Paul's theology of news and news handling but rather to see how his theological approach could shed critical light on the practice of Christians engaged in news handling in the contemporary church. Empirical research is thus important to discover key aspects of contemporary news handling and to avoid the Pauline critique being employed in a vacuum; indeed, if such a critique is grounded

---

[5] It is of course recognised that this is not the only theological framework which might be drawn out from Pauline texts. See discussion in section 2.4. above.

in the real communicative behaviour of Christians sharing news it could suggest how the gap between first-century Corinth and twenty-first century Britain might be bridged. To identify the need for data is, however, simply to open up the question suggested above; from the range of news handling undertaken by Christians on an ongoing basis, where are the data going to come from to enable a theological conversation with the apostle Paul to take place? To ask this question also involves asking two others: how are the necessary data going to be gathered and how is any Pauline critique going to be structured? This section will engage with the first two of these three questions, namely the nature and acquisition of such empirical data, while the final issue of critical structure will be addressed in the following section in this chapter.

6.3.2. Gathering Empirical Data: A Case Study Approach

It is possible to conceive of an approach to gathering empirical data which focuses on identifying broad trends within the wide sphere of Christian news handling. This might involve monitoring certain conduits of Christian news (newspapers, websites) over a period of time to establish what issues arise for the contemporary Christian engaged in sharing news. Such an approach has the attraction of producing conclusions which are of wide-ranging significance; it would suffer, however, from two failings: first, it would ignore the fact that news handling is a more complex process than simply producing texts and instead needs to be examined from the perspective of the producer and the audience as well; second, without a clear focus such a survey of news handling could easily slip into generalities which say more about the person doing the survey than the news handling itself.

Instead, within the sphere of qualitative research which is the obvious method for the data I am seeking to collect,[6] it is the case study approach which suggests itself as the most productive way forward. Such an approach is recognised as being a useful way of understanding contemporary communication and particularly news which is often focussed around individual episodes;[7] for the purposes of this study this method, which will comprise a detailed examination of an individual news story drawing on multiple sources of evidence, has the potential to enable an holistic view to be taken of the whole communicative process and provide rich data for a theological critique.[8] In particular a case study approach allows a news handling process to be examined from the perspective of production, text and reception which in turn is more likely than other approaches to draw out the theological issues faced by communication professionals and perceived by audiences of such news.[9]

The choice of which news stories will form the focus of a case study is obviously a matter of some importance. Certain considerations are important to bear in mind in

---

[6] See Klaus Bruhn Jensen and Nicholas W. Jankowski, eds., *A Handbook of Qualitative Methodologies For Mass Communication Research* (London: Routledge, 1991), especially 4-7, and Christine Daymon and Immy Holloway, *Qualitative Research Methods in Public Relations and Marketing Communications* (London: Routledge, 2002), 3-17 for a discussion of the advantages of qualitative over quantitative research with respect to communication research.

[7] See Daymon and Holloway, *Qualitative Research Methods*, 105-116 for an exploration of the advantages of a case study approach in enabling a communicative event to be examined from a number of angles. I have already suggested that news can be understood as 'event', 'story' and 'product'; it follows that a case study approach gives a good chance of examining these individual aspects of the communicative story in some detail.

[8] Such a hope must at this stage be tentative; while such an approach has been used before to acquire a range of data about various forms of communication, it has yet to achieve widespread use as a method of acquiring theological data about news handling. I remain clear, however, that it represents the best chance of understanding news handling to the depth required for theological analysis.

[9] I considered, and rejected, a grounded theory and ethnographic approach. Grounded theory has the benefit of flexibility and is well suited to a pioneer project, but to do it properly would have consumed too much time and space in this study. An ethnographic approach, in which I would have spent considerable time with Christians who handle news, would have enabled me to assess their practice and theological world view but would have left me ill-equipped to examine the texts they produce and their impact on the audience.

this respect. First, it is considered best practice that case-studies are clearly bounded in place and time, in order to maintain a proper focus for the empirical research and avoid conclusions which are too general and unspecific.[10] Second, there should be a reason to examine the particular news stories in question; they should not be selected at random but rather chosen because an initial perspective on them renders them of potential interest as an example of news handling.[11] Third, for the purposes of this study the case-studies chosen, while concerning specific news events, should nevertheless have the potential for wider relevance within the sphere of Christian news handling;[12] that is to say, if there is some continuity between the news handling employed in these case studies and that employed elsewhere in the Christian church, then the ensuing Pauline critique might have greater relevance for Christian communicators in today's church. The two case-studies I have chosen to examine – the handling in January 2004 of the Church of England's attendance statistics and Issue 33 of *Alpha News* (March-June 2004) – fit all three criteria; in my introductions to each case study I will argue that these examples of news sharing are not only of interest in themselves but are part of a broader background which suggests a wider application for a theological critique.[13] I will not suggest that these

---

[10] Daymon and Holloway, *Qualitative Research Methods*, 105. Such a criterion excludes a number of general news stories such as the behaviour of priests accused of paedophilia or the role of women in the ordained ministry, because these stories lack the necessary chronological and spatial parameters.

[11] Ibid., 110.

[12] As Daymon and Holloway helpfully sum up, 'A good case study, therefore, highlights the numerous factors governing managed communication in a particular setting, portraying something of its uniqueness while also – but not always – attempting to offer insights that have wider relevance.' Ibid., 106.

[13] It was these three criteria that also determined that I omit one of the case studies I had initially chosen for this thesis. I carried out some early research into news handling at the time of the controversy concerning the appointment of Canon Jeffrey John as Bishop of Reading, and focussed particularly on the letter written by nine diocesan bishops expressing their unease at the nomination. Over time, however, it became clear that this case study would not be suitable for this thesis; while it was certainly an area of interest, there was so much that rendered it unique that questions of wider relevance were hard to establish. Furthermore, the theological issue at the heart of the news was an area where opinion was so sharply divided that not only was reception analysis going to be complex to manage (and

two case-studies define something universally applicable about news handling but rather that they have a possible relevance beyond the narrow confines of their own background.

Data will be gathered from each case study using a model of production, text and reception. Comment has already been made on this approach with respect to the analysis of Pauline news, but it is worth recalling the advantages of such a method.[14] One of its strengths is that it recognises that communication is a complex process and the result of a symbiotic relationship between the producer of a certain message, the text of a message, and the way the audience receives and understands that message. It is a method of approach particularly appropriate for the theological focus of this study which is a critique of the theological values held by the producer of the text as well as those inherent in the text itself. Furthermore, although this study is primarily concerned with a critique of the practice of Christians engaged in handling news and not an analysis of audience reception, some understanding of how a news story is received in practice is important to compare with the reception envisaged by those who produced the text. The aim of the empirical research is to provide the data through which these examples of news handling can be understood from a theological perspective; the comprehensive model described above represents a productive way of achieving this aim.

The method of data collection will conform to the model of production, text and reception. For the production phase of each case study interviews were carried out both with the people directly responsible for the production of the text as well as informed observers who were likely to be able to shed light on the production process; in total I conducted six interviews between January and June 2004. Each

---

this turned out to be the case), but also any discussion of communication independent to the question of human sexuality promised to be difficult to achieve.

[14] This approach is evaluated and commended in Miller and others, *Circuit of Mass Communication*, especially 9-12. The rest of the study is an example of this methodology applied to a case study.

interview was semi-structured along similar lines: as well as exploring the background to the text's production and the key decisions made as it was put together I asked questions which opened up the interviewee's own understanding of news handling and the theological issues raised by it.[15] That is to say, the aim of the interview was not only to find out the technical data concerning a text's production, but also to put those realities in the context of the communicator's self-understanding and theological world view. Despite some initial concerns I had on access there were no problems in getting the agreement of participants to be interviewed. All interviews were recorded and full transcripts made; consent to quote verbatim was requested and received in all cases.

For the textual phase of each case study the relevant texts are analysed. Because of the different length of the two texts under consideration this analysis will vary in its structure; nevertheless, there is in broad terms a shared two-fold structure. First, each text is examined from a structural point of view, with consideration being given to the shape and composition of the text; then an attempt is made to look for deeper issues in the text, particularly in terms of implicit meanings and their theological implications. This latter approach will indicate what, if any, interpretive framework is underlying the text.[16]

In order to explore how the texts were received, a focus group approach was adopted and members asked how they responded to the two case-studies under consideration. The choice of focus groups was determined by certain factors; for the purpose of good discussion within the groups, and the quality of the resulting data, it was beneficial to identify homogenous groups which would share some commonality of interpretative values.[17] These groups also needed to comprise 'information-rich' participants who would have views on the two case-studies,

---

[15] Daymon and Holloway, *Qualitative Research Methods*, 166-185.

[16] Ibid., 140-145.

[17] Ibid., 186-200.

participants, therefore, who had comes across stories and press releases about church statistics and who were aware of material from Alpha News.[18] I decided, therefore, to use two groups of Anglican clergy, together with two groups of laity who were readers of the Church of England Newspaper (CEN). One of the clergy groups was drawn from a deanery chapter and the other was a group of curates on a residential training weekend. The lay CEN readers were part of distribution schemes in local churches in Bournemouth and Woking. Each group comprised 6-8 participants and met once between September and November 2004.

The advantage of this multiple-category design is that it acknowledges both clergy and laity as important consumers of religious news and also allows for a certain amount of comparison between categories.[19] Although neither category reached saturation, this was not required by the focus of the study for which the reception analysis is indicative rather than exhaustive.[20] Furthermore, because of the discrete role which the reception analysis played both in the empirical research and overall research project, it was not considered essential to adopt a scientific method of sampling.[21] By selecting the clergy groups as I did I was confident that a wide representation of age, churchmanship and gender would result, without being able to ensure that such a range was totally reflective of the wider picture of the Church of England. I recognised that, because church newspaper readership tends to be more widespread among middle-aged to older people, the lay focus groups would reflect this tendency. I also noted that CEN is especially popular among evangelical laity, but this is not exclusively the situation, and I would in any case take due

---

[18] Richard A. Krueger and Mary Anne Casey, *Focus groups: A Practical Guide for Applied Research*, 3rd ed. (London: SAGE, 2000), 25.

[19] Ibid., 31.

[20] Saturation would have required 3-4 groups from each category, and this was not possible or realistic in the time and space afforded by this study. See Ibid., 26-29.

[21] Although I was not unaware of the need to ensure that the groups did not just represent one point of view. For an argument in favour of small samples as I have pursued see Daymon and Holloway, *Qualitative Research Methods*, 157-165.

regard of this in my later analysis.[22] In general, I sought to keep in clear focus the overall picture, namely that although some reception analysis was necessary in order to describe the whole communicative process of Christian news and therefore reveal the impact of certain forms of Christian news handling, it was important that the focus group research did not dominate the overall theological emphasis of the project which finds its focus in the practice of Christian news managers. The aim of the groups was to demonstrate the range of responses to a particular news story, rather than to make definite conclusions about how news consumers access and receive church news.[23]

The aim of the above survey is to demonstrate that the case study approach was chosen, and with it a model of production, text and reception adopted, because it was judged that this would be the most productive way to gather the empirical data necessary to understand these examples of news handling from a theological perspective.[24] How this theological analysis takes place and feeds into a Pauline critique is the focus for the next section.

6.4. The Apostle Paul and Contemporary News: A Critical Framework

Having described the way in which data is to be gathered from the two examples of contemporary Christian news handling, it is now possible to address the question of

---

[22] Further data about interviews and focus groups can be found in Appendix 3.

[23] The exact nature of each focus group discussion is described in the respective case studies.

[24] In completing this survey thus I recognise that there is a much wider field of empirical theology that I have not touched in this methodology. The reason is simply one of space and focus; to embark on a survey of methodological frameworks used in empirical theology (as undertaken recently, for example by Mark Cartledge in Mark J. Cartledge, *Charismatic Glossolalia: An Empirical-Theological Study*, Ashgate New Critical Thinking in Theology and Biblical Studies (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002)) would have taken considerable time and run the risk of forcing this study away from its New Testament focus. As it is, I believe that I have drawn on best practice within secular communication research to establish a thorough framework for my examination of contemporary news handling.

how the theological approach of the apostle Paul with respect to news, as identified in this study thus far, will be used to critique this form of present-day communication. Each case study will comprise two chapters and will be structured in a similar way. The first chapter will comprise an analysis of the news handling from the perspective of production, text and reception, as outlined above. The data reporting will include quotations from interviews and focus groups as appropriate, but the main focus will be discovering the underlying theological issues in each phase of the case study. The second chapter comprises the theological critique of this example of news handling. The first step will be to clarify the theological issues raised by the case study (in each case two distinct but related themes emerge) before examining briefly how these are reflected in the wider practice of news handling within or outside the church; the aim of this latter step is to establish whether the questions raised by the example under consideration are of more general significance, and, therefore, if the Pauline critique is likely to have wider relevance.

For each of the four themes (two from each case study) the question will then be asked how an understanding of this theme is informed by a cruciform model of news as employed by the apostle Paul in certain texts from his correspondence with the Corinthian church. This form of theological dialogue is not one that is common either in communication theology or Pauline studies; there will, therefore, be a sense of evolution in the pattern that emerges. Nevertheless, three points may be borne in mind at the outset. First, it will be important to remember that what is being attempted is a critique of these examples of news handling, not from a broad theological standpoint, nor even from a general Pauline point of view, but instead from the perspective of Paul's theology of news as evidenced in the hardship narratives from his letters to Corinth. The focus is thus a narrow one and the aim specific: to describe how a model of cruciform news might impact theologically on the contemporary practice of Christian communicators; the other questions are interesting but must remain beyond the remit of this study. Second, it need not be the case that the Pauline critique simply takes the form of a restatement of the

findings from the first half of this study. Although the model of cruciform news will be the framework in which the themes are examined, the hardship narratives examined above are likely to yield fresh insights when brought up against contemporary communication; furthermore, it may well prove helpful to consider other passages related to the biblical texts already examined. Further exegetical analysis will be designed to build on previous work and not replace it. Third, it will be essential to bear in mind that the aim of this Pauline critique is primarily theological rather than practical. It is not my main objective to reach a number of practical recommendations for contemporary Christian communicators, but rather to suggest a renewed theological framework in which their news handling can take place. Thus I will not devote significant time to assessing the shortcomings or otherwise of the two examples of handling news examined, and any ideas of what a cruciform model of handling news might look like in practice will be necessarily illustrative rather than conclusive in their nature.

Indeed, such will also be the nature of the Pauline critique. The results which stem from using Paul's cruciform model of news will be indicative rather than conclusive. In other words, they will suggest how a Pauline framework might inform contemporary news handling rather than concluding that such a framework represents the sum of a Pauline or biblical perspective on this present-day practice, or that this approach is the final word on these two case-studies, let alone the more general field of Christian news handling. Nevertheless, these case-studies will demonstrate the extent to which a theology of the cross, as expressed in the writings of the apostle Paul, has a contribution to make to this important contemporary practice.

6.5. Conclusions

In this chapter I have outlined the argument by which I reached the conclusion that Paul's hardship narratives in his Corinthian correspondence can be described as a model of cruciform news, a model which could serve well as a critical framework

with which to analyse contemporary news handling. I then explained the rationale for adopting a case study approach to acquire the empirical data on which to base a critique of present-day communicative practice, and also outlined the way in which such data will be collected. I went on to describe the process by which Paul's first century example will be used to measure twenty-first century news sharing and suggested that the findings that are reached will be primarily theological rather than practical in nature; furthermore, while these conclusions may have implications beyond the specific case-studies, they will have to be made cautiously and with a certain provisionality. Such a methodology is in a sense an experiment, and can only be validated through its use; it is with this task that the next four chapters are engaged.

7. HANDLING NUMBERS: THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND AND ATTENDANCE STATISTICS: (1) ANALYSIS

7.1. Introduction

This chapter forms the first half of a case study in which I am seeking to demonstrate how a Pauline and cruciform model of handling news might enable us to make a critique of contemporary news handling. In it I begin with an examination of a contested area within church communicative practice, namely the handling by the Church of England of its own attendance statistics, with particular focus being given to the release in January 2004 of the church attendance statistics for 2002. I describe the background to this area of communication and the reasons for selecting it as a case study. I then carry out an analysis of the specific news story under discussion from a perspective of production, text and reception, and suggest the two main themes which emerge. It is these two themes which will then be taken forward for the Pauline critique which is the focus of the second half of this case study.

7.2. Background

One of the ongoing challenges facing the Church of England with respect to news over the last decade has been how it handles news about its own attendance statistics. There are a number of interrelated reasons for this situation, but an important part of the historical context is the communicative practice of Revd Dr William Beaver, Director of Communications for the Church of England from 1997 to 2002. Shortly after his appointment Dr Beaver took the unprecedented step of withholding the annual publication of the church's attendance statistics.[1] His

---

[1] The headline to these statistics was the 'Usual Sunday Attendance' ('uSa') figure which, while collected in various ways in different dioceses and parishes, still formed the most commonly used measure of church attendance. It had been the practice of the church since 1985 to release these statistics in preliminary form before their later formal publication. See

argument at the time was that the figures did not accurately reflect the life of the church, and that more attention should be given by journalists to other markers, such as the number of ordinations or the levels of parish giving; this would only be done if the church attendance statistics themselves were not published.[2] It is now generally recognised that this move backfired: there was some unease within the church context,[3] and considerable suspicion outside it, as religious correspondents believed that the only reason the figures were being withheld was that they showed an ever sharper decline in church attendance.[4] Although the figures for two years were finally released in November 1999, it seems that some damage had been done; for a number of broadsheet religious affairs correspondents, who are key figures in the church's handling of news, the mishandling of church attendance statistics became a symbol of a church engaging in what was characterised in the political sphere as 'spin'.[5]

It would be inaccurate, however, to focus too closely on this one episode concerning Dr Beaver, and ignore a number of other reasons why handling church attendance

---

Church Statistics: Some Facts and Figures about the Church of England (London: Central Board of Finance of the Church of England, 1985-).

[2] In a research interview conducted at Church House, Westminster on 23 March 2001 Dr Beaver also expressed some frustration at the way church attendance statistics had been used by the broadsheet press to write negative stories about the church. Publicly he argued that the figure of uSa had ceased to be meaningful. See Ruth Gledhill, "Empty Pews Force Church Recount" *The Times*, 13 November 1999, 13.

[3] See comments from Lynda Barley, Head of Research and Statistics, Church House, Westminster, reported later in this chapter. Bob Jackson, author of two statistical analyses of church growth and decline, described the policy of withholding statistics as a 'disaster' which only resulted in further media mistrust of the church. (Comments made during a research interview conducted at Old Alresford Place, Hampshire on 20 January 2004.)

[4] For example see Victoria Combe, "Anglican Churchgoers Fall Below One Million" *Daily Telegraph*, 13 November 1999, 2.

[5] Bates, "Why God Needs Good PR" . Lynda Barley and Steve Jenkins, Acting Director of Communications for the Church of England, both expressed their awareness of this criticism and breakdown in trust. See also the comment from Steve Jenkins about the episode: 'What it did was to heighten the tension around attendance, because it was then open to any journalist that the reason they weren't published is because they were appalling.' (Research interview, 12 May 2005.)

statistics is a demanding task for those charged with doing so. From a general perspective it is valuable to remember that statistics are frequently a contested area within public life. This is especially the case within the contemporary political sphere; while the Conservative government of the 1980s was often criticised for the way it managed the monthly unemployment figures, the strategic approach adopted by the New Labour administration has resulted in a range of official statistics coming under special scrutiny.[6] Beginning with the 1997 election campaign, and continuing to the present day, the party gave particular prominence to quantifiable measures of success with respect to improving the public services (for example reducing hospital waiting lists by 100,000); the result has been a sustained debate about whether these targets have been reached, and accusations that figures have been presented in a misleading way.[7] It seems that statistics play an increasingly significant role in public and political discourse; they are one of the main ways in which a public body's success can be quantified. In this context the job of handling statistical news is more demanding than ever before.[8]

A further specific challenge facing the Church of England is that it is not the only body releasing news about its own attendance statistics. Christian Research, a para-church organisation set up under former government statistician Dr Peter Brierley to undertake research into various aspects of church life, has conducted four

---

[6] For many commentators the purchase back in 1995 by the Labour Central Office of the 'Excalibur' computer software, which was designed among other things to check the accuracy of government statistics, was a sign of a party prepared to do battle over statistics. See Nicholas Jones, *Campaign 1997: How the General Election was Won and Lost* (London: Indigo, 1997), 20-22 and Richard Hefferman, "Media Management: Labour's Political Communications Strategy," in *The Impact of New Labour*, ed. Gerald R. Taylor (Basingstoke: Macmillian, 1999), 53.

[7] For an examination of the specific debate over waiting lists see Rudolf Klein, *The New Politics of the National Health Service*, 4th ed. (Harlow: Prentice Hall, 2001), 203-213; and for a more general overview of statistical promises and the approach of New Labour see David Coates, "The Character of New Labour," in *New Labour in Power*, ed. David Coates and Peter Lawler (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), 11ff.

[8] This might explain the popularity of the Channel 4 website FactCheck during the 2005 election campaign. See Dennis Kavanagh and David Butler, *The British General Election of 2005* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 101 and www.channel4.com/news/factcheck.

surveys of English church life. These have revealed a steady decline in membership in all churches, especially the Church of England, and have resulted in publications which have painted a bleak picture of the church's present state and future.[9] The church's response to this research has been ambivalent: although, according to Bob Jackson, former government statistician and then Research Missioner for Springboard, the Archbishop of Canterbury's Evangelism Initiative, senior church leaders for a long time did not consider questions of church membership as a proper subject for detailed scrutiny,[10] nevertheless the church hierarchy was clearly frustrated at what it perceived to be negative messages emerging from Christian Research.[11] Thus while the Church of England has come to acknowledge officially the importance of accurate statistics of church attendance, among other things,[12] there is still an element of competition in the actual sphere of sharing this statistical news.

---

[9] Peter Brierley, *'Christian' England: What the 1989 English Church Census Reveals* (London: MARC Europe, 1991); Peter Brierley, *The Tide Is Running Out. What the English Church Attendance Survey Reveals* (London: Christian Research, 2000); Peter Brierley, *Pulling Out of the Nosedive: A Contemporary Picture of Churchgoing: What the 2005 English Church Census Reveals* (London: Christian Research, 2006). It is true to say that the last report, as the title indicates, suggests a less pessimistic future for the church than the previous two reports, but the trend is still one of decline.

[10] Bob Jackson, *Hope for the Church: Contemporary Strategies for Growth*, Explorations (London: Church House Publishing, 2002), 17-26. A useful resource for this argument that numbers do not matter greatly is the body of contemporary research showing that churches have never been full. For examples see Robin Gill, *Churchgoing and Christian Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999) and Robin Gill, *The 'Empty' Church Revisited*, Explorations in Practical, Pastoral and Empirical Theology (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003).

[11] This tension was mentioned by Lynda Barley and confirmed by Dr Peter Brierley in a research interview conducted at Vision House, Eltham on 19 April 2004. He mentioned the official guidance from Church House, Westminster that dioceses should not cooperate with the 1998 English Church Attendance Survey. See also Brierley, *Tide Is Running Out*, 21.

[12] See *Statistics: A Tool for Mission; A Report by the Statistics Review Group* (London: Church House Publishing, 2000), a centrally-commissioned report on statistics which argued that church attendance figures should be used to plan for future mission and not only to calculate parish share payments. It also argued for the replacement of the Usual Sunday Attendance measure with Average Sunday Attendance ('aSa')

A final reason why handling news about church attendance statistics is a complex task is to be found in the way that these statistics, both official (from Church House) and unofficial (from Christian Research and other sources) go on to be reported and analysed. From within the church Bob Jackson persists in using uSa and with it showing an ongoing decline in church attendance.[13] For sociologists of religion the decline in people attending church is often a key part of their analysis, either arguing for the existence of a growing divide between belief and practice,[14] or increasing secularisation in the UK.[15] For those newspapers for whom the state of the established church still has news value, the church attendance statistics offer a chance to make a quantitative assessment of an organisation which frequently denies easy analysis.[16] In an editorial environment where traditional aspects of the British establishment come under special scrutiny, it is not difficult to see how the picture of gradual decline in churchgoing receives considerable exposure, and has led, on occasions, to very pessimistic stories about the future of the church.[17] Thus the statistics which the church compiles and communicates are used by other organisations, and largely in a way that could be said to undermine the church's ongoing role in society.

---

[13] Jackson, *Hope for the Church*, 8-16.

[14] For an early example of statistics being used in this way see David Martin, *A Sociology of English Religion* (London: SCM, 1967), 34-51 and more recently Grace Davie, *Religion in Britain since 1945: Believing without Belonging* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), 45-73.

[15] Steve Bruce, *God is Dead: Secularization in the West* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), 60-74.

[16] A survey of daily newspapers from 5 February 2002 and 13 January 2004, after the release of the church statistics, shows that the news was reported by *The Times* (both times), *Daily Telegraph* (both times), *The Independent* (once) *and Daily Mail* (once). Even though it has a religious affairs correspondent *The Guardian* did not report the news, and it was not picked up by any other paper. For more on why attendance statistics still matter to the media see Jackson, *Hope for the Church*, 58-59.

[17] Jonathan Petre, "Church Congregations Fall 100,000 in Two Years" *Daily Telegraph*, 13 January 2004, 8; "The Vanishing Congregation" *Daily Mail*, 13 January 2004, 15; Carol Midgley, "Spirited away: why the end is nigh for religion" *The Times*, 4 November 2004, Section 2, 4-5.

It is for these reasons that I have identified this area as a rewarding area to study. Not only has the church's previous practice in handling statistical news received a critical response, from inside and outside the church, but for a range of reasons the ongoing task of dealing with such news remains a complex and a challenging one for those charged with doing so. In short, if the church was accused of spin once before, how is it now standing up to the cultural pressures I described in chapter one and the more specific pressures outlined above? I will be looking in detail at the text which in January 2004 accompanied the release of the church attendance statistics for 2002; the reason for focusing on this text in particular is that it was the most recent document produced when I came to conduct the research interviews, so for practical reasons it was the most straightforward text to consider with those who produced it.[18] It is my hope that as the text is examined themes will emerge which are of wider relevance for Christian communication professionals and on which Paul's example and approach in first century Corinth might shed some significant light.

7.3. Production

7.3.1. Introduction

In this section I will outline the constraints under which the text released in January 2004 was produced. An important part of this analysis will be the examination of the work of two church officers based at Church House, Westminster, the administrative headquarters for the Church of England: Lynda Barley, Head of Research and Statistics, and Steve Jenkins, then acting Director of Communications.[19] Lynda Barley was responsible for the initial analysis of the statistics, writing a briefing paper *Key Findings* which was the basis for the later

---

[18] In selecting this text I ensured that it was not significantly different to texts which had been produced in previous years concerning church attendance statistics.

[19] Research interviews were conducted at Church House, Westminster on 7 April 2004 (Barley) and 12 May 2005 (Jenkins).

press release and news story written by Steve Jenkins. An analysis of the research interviews with them will indicate the different pressures which were present as the text was being created. I will argue that the constraints present during the production of this text were threefold: to maintain professional standards over and against accusations of spin, to protect the reputation of the church as a national institution of ongoing significance, and so to manage the perceived bad news that any negative message might be minimised.

7.3.2. Maintaining Professional Standards

> I don't think we should spin; we definitely shouldn't be into spin. We never should have got into that. That was a mistake of the first order...It didn't do us any good; we're still suffering from it.[20]

Both Lynda Barley and Steve Jenkins seem to feel the burden of the past as they describe their present professional responsibility; the events of the late 1990s, and the suggestion that the church had been guilty of spin, apparently reinforce their determination to pursue their own roles in a way fully consonant with their Christian faith and specialist training. For his part Jenkins is aware of the charge of spin which has been levelled at church communicators in the past, and is determined that this accusation could not be made against him. In discussion over the text released in January 2004 he is clear about the ways in which the text he produced did not share the marks of spin: he did not try and hide the negative elements in the story; he ensured the full statistics were published at the same time as the press release; he eschewed a more attention-grabbing headline than the statistics themselves merited. Throughout the text's production he wanted to demonstrate high professional standards and a commitment to telling the truth as a Christian communicator.

---

[20] Linda Barley, research interview, 7 April 2004.

For her part Barley also seeks to distance herself from perceived past shortcomings (when she was not in post) by emphasising instead her identity and independence as a career and professional statistician. She is proud of the way her department has achieved more independence from the Communications Unit on the one hand and those whom she describes as 'the financiers' on the other. She is keen to defend the story which she saw emerging from the statistics themselves, namely the signs of growth in attendance among children and young people. Nevertheless, the fact that she has to defend this process at all demonstrates not only that seeing a clear picture in statistical analysis from the whole church is often a challenge itself, but also that communicating good news in this area is problematic because of what has gone before. It is clear that professionally Lynda Barley and Steve Jenkins continue to feel the pressure of the past.

7.3.3. Protecting Reputation

> My job as a press officer is to highlight parts of the statistics, bits that are interesting, exciting. My job as a press officer is also to regard the image of the Church of England. So, while I put out that book to journalists so that they have all the figures, the press release that goes with it tends to highlight, if you like, the positives within it.[21]

It is to be expected that, as officers of the national church and employees of the Church of England both Jenkins and Barley should demonstrate a level of concern for the reputation of the church they serve. At the heart of public relations is the priority given to creating and protecting an organisation's public image.[22] Thus in contrast to an independent statistician like Peter Brierley, a sociologist like Grace Davie, or even a local vicar like Bob Jackson, the framework for especially Jenkins' and also Barley's communicative practice is the standing of the national church as a

---

[21] Steve Jenkins, research interview, 12 May 2004.

[22] Smythe, Dorward, and Reback, *Corporate Reputation*, 3-19; Haywood, *Manage Your Reputation*, 7-11.

whole; in this context the way the church as an institution is viewed on a national level is of considerable significance.[23]

Yet it is the precise nature of this reputation that is so important to note. What seems to motivate Jenkins and Barley is a concern to show that the Church of England is still an organisation of national significance, even if the attendance statistics indicate that the number of churchgoers is still declining. The reputation in question is thus of the church as an important feature of the English social and cultural landscape. Such was the explicit message of the texts on which Barley and Jenkins worked immediately before and after the text under present discussion. On 8 December 2003 Jenkins released a text to journalists and on the Church of England website entitled 'Latest Figures Show Churches Alive in the Community'. It included the Christmas attendance statistics (showing 39% of people were likely to attend a church service over Christmas) and also statistics on how many people had visited a church in 2002 (86%). It concluded, 'the church continues to have an important place in people's lives'.[24] As the research interviews were being conducted in spring 2004, another story was being prepared about the place of the church in the community; it used the important position of the church in society, as evidenced in a survey by the Opinion Research Bureau, to make the case for greater state help for maintaining church buildings.[25] It suggested that the survey 'confirms the strong place which the church buildings play in the community.'[26] Thus the

---

[23] Although it is interesting to note that even since becoming Archdeacon of Walsall Bob Jackson has maintained a certain critical distance from the institution of which he is now a senior member. See further discussion of this in chapter 8.

[24] *Latest Figures Show Churches Alive in the Community* (Church of England Website 8 December 2003 accessed 19 March 2007); available from www.cofe.anglican.org/news/latest_figures_show_churches_alive_in_the_community.html.

[25] *New Research Shows 42% Say that Churches Should Be Funded by the State* (Church of England Website 20 April 2004 accessed 19 March 2007); available from www.cofe.anglican.org/news/news_item.2004-10-19.9713913526.

[26] Lynda Barley has gone on to write two short booklets which use attendance and other statistics to argue that the church still has a vital role to play in national cultural life. See Lynda Barley, *Christian Roots, Contemporary Spirituality*, Time to Listen (London: Church

aspect of reputation which seems uppermost in the minds of Jenkins and Barley is to affirm the important part which the church still plays in national life.

That these officers should exhibit such concern is of little surprise when one considers the physical and symbolic location in which they work. Church House Westminster, the administrative headquarters of the Church of England, stands just behind the Palace of Westminster and thus at the heart of the bureaucratic life of the nation. This geographical location underlines the historic sense of the Church of England as a key part of the establishment of England; given a society which has an increasingly complex relationship to the inherited and 'official' faith it would seem to add further weight to the responsibility of those working in Church House to guard the image and reputation of the established church as a vital and significant part of national life. Moreover, this location sets up the potential for greater tension with the media outlets elsewhere in London which seek to place all forms of the Westminster-based establishment under special scrutiny. The physical locus of Jenkins' and Barley's communicative activity would seem to reinforce the concern for a church with a reputation of being at the heart of national life.

7.3.4. Managing Bad News

This concern for the church's reputation is linked to a shared responsibility on the part of Jenkins and Barley so to handle the statistical news that it does not come across as unduly 'bad news'. There is, however, a difference in who Jenkins and Barley think might interpret their data as 'bad news'. Jenkins is primarily concerned about how the story will be reported in the secular media; aware that much coverage of the church is negative, his desire is to highlight the positive headline story in *Key Briefings* (the growth in children and young people's attendance).

House Publishing, 2006) and Lynda Barley, *Churchgoing Today*, Time to Listen (London: Church House Publishing, 2006).

> I know that when I put out anything, I know that a) I have to put them [the figures] out and b) they are going to have something negative picked out of them, and that is going to be the main story. So my aim is to try and...find a way of getting the other parts of the story into their stories in some way.[27]

The run of negative stories about the church in the broadsheet press is an ongoing pressure for him and other church press officers; it is his judgement that certain newspapers only want bad news about the church, so this particular news story needs to be handled in such a way as to minimise its negative content.

Barley is more concerned with the impact of bad news on ordinary church members. She is aware that statistical news is often seen as bad and that this has a demoralising effect on people in the pews. It is this concern for how people respond to news which could be seen as bad that shapes her communicative behaviour:

> I think I'm about giving people the right information to move the church forward, and I mean forward. Sometimes that may have to be bad news, but like with a child you have to deliver bad news in a way that's appropriate to that child...I suppose my big thrust is to help restore confidence, to help people realise that God is in the right and that the messages are for their good...I want to be honest. I don't want to do anything but honest. But I don't want to demoralise people.'[28]

Barley clearly feels the weight of the responsibility to handle news about church attendance in such a way that builds confidence and encourages people.[29]

7.3.5. Summary

It is my conclusion that in producing the text which is the focus for our discussion Lynda Barley and Steve Jenkins were under some pressure: the way church

---

[27] Steve Jenkins, research interview, 12 May 2004.

[28] Lynda Barley, research interview, 7 April 2004.

[29] Barley here draws on her ongoing ministry as non-stipendiary minister in the Diocese of Exeter and her regular contact with churchgoers.

attendance statistics had been handled in the past made for a complex context in which to work and maintain professional and Christian standards of communication; they were clearly motivated by a desire to protect the reputation of the church as an organisation of ongoing national significance, even if the statistics indicated further decline in churchgoing; and they were mindful of the ways in which negative messages could be picked up on by the media and ordinary churchgoers. How this productive context is reflected in the text and news handling itself is now to be seen.

7.4. Text

7.4.1. Introduction

So far we have seen how the text under discussion was produced by professionals subject to a range of constraints; in this section my aim will be to explore whether the desire to protect reputation and minimise bad news is evident in the text itself. Before we look at the text in some detail, however, it is worth drawing attention to the statistics on which the text is based.[30] Released at the same time as the text under discussion, one initial impression may strike the lay observer. Only one of the twenty two percentage indicators on page one shows a percentage rise in attendance; even that statistic (weekly highest attendance for children and young people) is accompanied by significant falls for average and usual Sunday attendance for the same age range. For example, in 2002 13,000 fewer children and young people were in church on an average Sunday than in 2000. The overall picture looks a bleak one, and thus the challenge for Barley and Jenkins is considerable.

The press release appeared on 12 January 2004 and was also put on the news section of the main Church of England website.[31] As a document it drew heavily on the *Key*

---

[30] See Appendix 2.

[31] See Appendix 2 for the full text; also *Provisional Attendance Figures for 2002* (Church of England Website 12 January 2004 accessed 19 March 2007); available from www.cofe.anglican.org/news/provisional_attendance_figures_for_2002.html.

Findings paper prepared by Lynda Barley for Steve Jenkins, and thus both Barley and Jenkins were instrumental in the production of the final document. At under 400 words it is quite a short document, extending to six brief paragraphs. In it there seem to be two prevailing concerns: a desire to minimise bad news by emphasising the positive stories and providing reassurance about the Church of England as an institution of ongoing importance.

7.4.2. Minimising Bad News

The first characteristic of the press release is how it seeks to minimise bad news and emphasise the positive aspects of the statistics. This is achieved in a number of ways. First, the press release is structured in such a way as to give priority to the signs of growth which Barley has discerned in the statistics. The text can be divided neatly into two halves: the first half (opening three paragraphs) comprises largely positive statistics concerning youth and children's work, on both a national and diocesan level. Seven dioceses are highlighted which have seen improved attendance for every measure among under 16s, namely Sunday, weekly and attendance levels. This theme is continued in the third paragraph with further statistics on youth and children's ministry, namely children involved in activities other than worship and the number of volunteers who work with children and youth. The second half of the text focuses on the overall picture of church attendance which is less positive. Not only are the statistics themselves referred to, but an attempt is also made to explain the relationship between the various measures for church attendance, namely 'average Sunday attendance' and 'average weekly attendance'. Structurally, therefore, there is a move within the text from good news to bad; although equal space is given to both, the prior place given to the positive statistics indicates what the key message is.

The positive tone is further reinforced by the use of certain vocabulary. There are double the number of references to attendance growing or remaining at the same level as there are to declining; the increased proportion of words given to positive

news helps reinforce the sense of good news. From the way the text is structured and words chosen one might imagine that the statistics themselves presented a broadly mixed picture with some decline and some growth. In fact, as we have seen, the picture is much more weighted to negative statistics rather than positive ones. Nothing that is in the text is untrue: some dioceses did see growth in one or two indicators among children and young people, but it must be asked whether the positive tone of the press release is justified by the general overview of the statistics themselves. What is clear is that Barley and Jenkins have followed through their desire not to hide the facts but give special emphasis to the positive statistics. Our later reception analysis might give us an indication of how successful this strategy has been.

7.4.3. Providing Reassurance

In the face of a media which would like to caricature the established church as being in free-fall and Christian Research which regularly produces attendance statistics which make bleak reading,[32] this text aims to reassure both the faithful and the country at large that the church is still an important organisation.[33] It does this in a number of ways: first, global figures (which emphasise size) are preferred to percentage trends (which in this case indicate decline); there are twelve global figures listed compared to seven percentage indicators (and two of these are not indicators of trend); the message is that a lot of people still come to church at least on a monthly basis.[34] The figure of one million worshippers quoted in paragraph five seems to be of some symbolic value; given that the press made considerable

---

[32] For example, Peter Brierley's suggestion that if decline continues at the present, less than 1% of the nation will go to church by 2016. See Brierley, *Tide Is Running Out*, 28.

[33] See comments in section 7.3.3. above.

[34] Contrast the comment of Peter Brierley who notes that from a strategic point of view trends are as important as global numbers. Brierley, *Tide Is Running Out*, 12.

comment when the uSa figure fell below one million, perhaps the church is keen to emphasise the aSa figure is still above that level (if only just).[35]

Second, a technique is employed whereby caveats are used in phrases which convey negative news. Two examples of this occur in paragraph five where a percentage decrease in attendance is followed by the phrase 'but remained…', followed by a global amount. This linguistic device has the effect of lessening the negative impact of the previous clause by balancing it with a more favourable piece of news, and therefore reassuring the reader that despite the apparent bad news, the church is still very large indeed.[36] A similar device is the technical comparison between weekly attenders and monthly attenders, as well as Sunday attenders, and attenders at other times; the message here seems to be that more people are coming to church than at first seems to be the case, and thus the reader may be reassured. The assumption behind this text is that declining church attendance threatens the reputation of the church, and therefore reassurance of the church's health and significance is needed.

A final way in which the text seeks to provide reassurance is the detached tone which is present throughout. The subject of the active verbs are institutions, not people: *the dioceses…saw; the Church of England asked…; parishes also reported….* There is no personal response to any of the figures listed in the document; one way of interpreting this is that there is no need for panic on the part of the Church of England.[37] The news is not sufficiently alarming or worrying to deserve episcopal

---

[35] Combe, "Anglican Churchgoers Fall Below One Million"; Gledhill, "Empty Pews Force Church Recount".

[36] A similar technique is used in paragraph four where a 2% decline is followed by a sentence which includes two large percentage increases.

[37] Of course, another interpretation is that the senior leadership of the church is not really interested in church attendance statistics. Certainly Lynda Barley said she finds it hard to find a bishop to speak on statistics, and Bob Jackson traces the historical and theological reasons why bishops have shied away from looking too closely at figures of churchgoers. See Jackson, *Hope for the Church*, 17-26.

comment; the Church of England is still a sizeable organisation with a clear role to play in national life. The text is designed to keep this reputation intact.

7.4.4. Summary

On one level this text seems like a standard piece of news handling, a press release accompanying the publication of some annual statistics, following the usual formula of emphasising the positive and playing down the negative. However, we have seen that beneath the surface the text is dominated by two main concerns: the need to minimise the bad news about a decline in church attendance, a decline which is significant and ongoing, through giving emphasis to the one positive statistic that is there; and the desire to protect the reputation of the church as a significant national institution through making reassuring points about the ongoing size of the church. Given the context in which the news was handled, little of this should be surprising, for the text betrays all the constraints present for those charged with handling the news: the statistics have to be published in an open way, and yet must be done so in a way that does not give an easy bad news story for the broadsheet press, reaffirms the reputation of the established church as an important part of national life, and manages to encourage some people; all this must be done without support from other parts of the church bureaucracy or senior leaders. The result is a text which does not seek to hide completely the negative statistics but handle them in a very careful way. Barley and Jenkins have probably avoided the excesses of spin of which Dr Beaver was accused; what part of their audience makes of the text they produced is the question to which we now turn.

7.5. Reception

7.5.1. Introduction

Up to this point I have argued that the news story under discussion betrays a number of the demands that were present in its production: to present the rather bleak statistical news in as positive a light as possible, and thereby to protect the reputation of the established church. But how was this news story received by

churchgoers themselves, ordained and lay? The question is asked not because an attempt is being made to ascertain whether the news handling was 'successful' or not, but rather because in considering how the news story was received further light will be shed on the theological issues that sharing such news involves.

Owing to the intended dual readership of the text under discussion, participants in the focus groups related to the text in two ways: as consumers (that is, as readers of a story on the Church of England website) and observers (that is, as third-party commentators on a document which was produced as a press release for media organisations). The boundaries between these two ways of reading the text were porous, and focus group members moved easily and frequently between both approaches as they discussed the text in front of them.[38]

7.5.2. Initial Responses

Despite the diversity within and between the focus groups there was a striking level of shared dissatisfaction at the text they were reading. There were a range of reasons for this: participants found the text confusing, dry and frustrating to read; they noted that there was no mention made of people or stories to accompany the dry statistics; they were disappointed at the lack of any analysis of, or comment on, the statistics as they were being presented. The recipients of the story were looking for some quote from an individual commenting on how these statistics would be used by the church; as one lay person put it, 'there is no attempt to analyse why.'[39]

Yet for all their initial frustrations focus group members were able, given time, to identify what they believed were the key messages in the story. A helpful way this was done was by asking them to suggest alternative headlines to the text; their responses betrayed both an understanding of what the text was trying to

---

[38] Initially only the press release itself was given out; later on in the discussion groups the first page of the statistics themselves was made available.

[39] Lay person, focus group C.

communicate (the encouraging news on young people's churchgoing) as well as some of the messages below the surface.

> More young people attend church now than before.
>
> Signs of growth among changing patterns of attendance.
>
> Church happens throughout the week, not just on Sunday.
>
> Things aren't as bad as the figures say they are.
>
> Don't panic!
>
> C of E not yet dead!

There was a recognition that the story was an attempt to emphasise the positive signs in church attendance and thereby confirm that the Church of England was in a healthier position than people sometimes assumed. Readers noted the structure of the story in putting all the positive statistics at the beginning of the story, and also the way in which negative statistics were immediately balanced by reassuring figures of the church's ongoing size. Therefore, for all the dissatisfaction at the dense style of the story, the readers noticed the two themes we have already identified: emphasise the positive over the negative and thereby give reassuring signs about the continuing health of the church.

7.5.3. Analysis

It was when group members were handed the overview page of the statistics themselves that the general tone of response changed from one of frustration to one of more open criticism of the text. From the discussion which followed in each of the focus groups, two points may be made. First, it was not felt that the positive tone of the press release was borne out by the statistics which were being released at the same time; readers described a discrepancy between the sheet of negative percentage trends and the new story they had just read.

> It is not as good as the script is it?[40]
>
> They are trying to make good news out of lots of minuses.[41]

Recipients had identified the positive message that was being communicated but they did not believe that was consistent with the overall message of the statistics themselves, which showed a picture of overwhelming decline. Indeed, it led some participants to accuse those who produced the text of precisely what we know they were trying to avoid, namely the practice of 'spin'. More than one group member used the word 'desperate' to describe this communicative approach, and one clergyperson expressed criticism in biblical terms.

> I think Jeremiah would have a go at them. 'Crying peace, peace, where there is no peace.' Success, success, where in these terms there is no success.[42]

Readers were not depressed by the negative statistics; what did unsettle them was the apparent attempt to hide them.

Second, there was strikingly little enthusiasm for protecting the reputation of the church as an important national body. While recognising the challenges facing those who handle this sort of news about the church on a national basis, the readers were clear in expressing what they would have preferred to see in the news story, namely analysis of what the figures meant and comment from senior church leaders on what was going to be done about them. In so arguing the participants placed less worth on the church's national reputation than those who had produced the text; they saw more value in the church admitting what it had got wrong than claiming that things were going better than was in fact the case.

---

[40] Lay person, focus group D.

[41] Clergyperson, focus group A.

[42] Clergyperson, focus group A.

> I think I would want to present in any article both the honesty that yes, we admit as a church that something is lacking, that we are not doing, and we take seriously the need to address that and change where change is needed.[43]

One clergyperson said that the desire to protect the reputation of the church was misplaced.

> Maybe things do need to hit rock bottom before people are spurred into action. It is telling it as it is; that was what the prophets were always up to. Why are we so afraid of that? If we are worshipping a God who we believe in and we have hope in, then we shouldn't be afraid of a few figures.[44]

Participants were much more interested in establishing where the church really was and what could be done about it rather than being reassured that everything was still alright.

7.5.4. Summary

The response from across the focus groups to this example of news handling was sharply critical. Not only were technical concerns about comprehensibility and analysis raised, but deeper concerns were voiced about how such statistical news was being handled. Group members did not believe that the positive tone of the news story was validated by the statistics themselves; they saw the story to be one essentially of bad news which it was more important to acknowledge than deflect attention from. In voicing these responses lay and ordained participants expressed their priorities in communication: protecting the reputation of the church was not a major concern for them; their priority was to understand and act on the decline portrayed in the figures, and not to communicate them as if this reality did not matter. Readers showed themselves to be articulate and informed about the complexities of sharing news in the contemporary media environment, but also

---

[43] Clergyperson, focus group B.

[44] Clergyperson, focus group A.

clear that the church had particular responsibilities to fulfil with regard to communication. As one lay member concluded:

> It is selective use of statistics. It is the way of the world – should it be the way of the church?[45]

7.6. Conclusions

In this chapter I have sought to demonstrate why there is more to the Church of England's handling of attendance statistics than simply distributing the latest set of figures. Using a text produced in January 2004 and through an analytical model of production, text and reception I have argued that in fact there are two main themes running through this story: the concern to protect the reputation of the national and established church in England, and a fear of the potential impact of a negative message as it is presented by secular journalists and received by churchgoers. These themes were present in the production of the text and could be seen in the way the story itself was framed. The findings from the focus group research, however, were that although the readers of the story recognised the concern for reputation and minimising bad news, they had questions about whether this approach was appropriate or successful. There was a remarkable consensus that what readers wanted was not a clever use of statistics to give a good image to the church but a frank recognition of what the statistics represent and how they are going to be addressed. Indeed, the reception analysis leads us to question the two assumptions which we discerned were driving forces behind the production of the text, and leaves us with two critical questions about handling news: how important is protecting reputation and is 'bad news' always bad? It is on these two crucial areas that we hope the apostle Paul's communicative practice in Corinth, what I describe as 'cruciform news', will shed some critical light.

---

[45] Lay person, focus group C.

8. HANDLING NUMBERS: THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND AND ATTENDANCE STATISTICS: (2) PAULINE CRITIQUE

8.1. Introduction

This chapter comprises an assessment of what Paul's communicative example, as evidenced in the Corinthian hardship narratives might contribute to our understanding of the two common themes which have emerged from our analysis thus far, namely the nature of reputation – its creation and protection - within news handling, and the nature of 'bad news'. Each theme will be considered in turn: after setting the area within the wider sphere of news handling I will then outline how Paul's communicative practice in Corinth, evidenced in his hardship narratives and summed up under the phrase 'cruciform news', might form a critique not only of this particular case study but the wider issues it has raised.[1]

8.2. Reputation

8.2.1. Reputation and News Handling

We have seen how a key question for those who handled the news about attendance statistics was how they could protect the reputation of the church as an important national body; this concern was evident in the text itself. Yet from our reception analysis the question was also raised as to how important reputation should be for the Christian handling news. Does it really matter how the church is seen and regarded? Before I suggest how the apostle Paul might enable a critique to be made in this area, it is worthwhile setting the question of reputation in a broader cultural

---

[1] In attempting this analysis I am not underestimating the difference between the cultural position of the church in Corinth (a small sect in a largely pagan city) and the national role played by the Church of England today. Nevertheless, the communicative method of Paul which we have described is based not on the status of the church in society but on his response to the person and work of Jesus Christ. It is this christological focus that renders his example of value and significance for today's Christian communicators, on whom the call to faithful Christian discipleship is as clear as ever.

context, not least to understand why it is an issue not just in this case study but in other examples of handling news. I will draw on the work of sociologist John B. Thompson and his analysis of the role played by reputation in public discourse.

Reputation can be understood as a social construct, a representation of our public image which is both projected by ourselves onto a community and by that community onto ourselves; it has always had a role in social discourse.[2] Yet in a wide-ranging study on the role of scandal in contemporary political and public life, John B. Thompson also argues that reputation is an increasingly precious commodity of considerable symbolic value in public discourse.[3] He defines reputation as the relative estimation or esteem accorded to an individual or institution by others, and suggests, therefore, that the higher the estimation and the greater the range of individuals who hold it, the higher the reputation.[4] He argues that reputation is thus an area of symbolic power which is frequently contested in a political climate where character matters more than competence.[5] Thompson goes on to describe what marks our reputation as an unusual kind of resource for public life, namely that it takes a long time to accumulate, is intrinsically contestable, is not depleted through use (although will be through misuse) and may be difficult to restore – and in some cases impossible.[6] Thompson's thesis is that in today's media environment of increased visibility, and in the context of an emerging 'politics of trust', reputation – both individual and corporate – is of more symbolic value than

---

[2] McIlory, *Style or Substance: Does the Reputation of the Church Matter?*, Cambridge papers towards a biblical mind; vol. 13, no.1 (Cambridge: Jubilee Centre, 2004), 1

[3] Thompson, *Political Scandal* .

[4] Ibid., 246 He also makes an interesting distinction between 'skill-specific reputation' and 'character reputation'.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Ibid., 247-248. See the quotation by Sir Anthony Cleaver of IBM 'Public relations is long-term; a reputation built over many years can be seriously damaged in seconds.' Quoted in Haywood, *Manage Your Reputation*, 11.

ever before.[7] At a time when reputation is more contested than ever, it has never mattered more what others think of us.

Thompson demonstrates how political scandals have the potential to function as reputation depleters, but a more general point may be made about the interaction between news and reputation. A range of negative stories – from disappointing annual results to poor customer service – all have the potential to diminish an organisation's reputation, and, in an environment where reputation matters more than ever, that is an area of concern for all those handling news.[8] That some potentially harmful stories do not end up actually damaging a business' reputation merely illustrates this point; it emphasises the efforts taken by 'reputation managers', as PR professionals are increasingly called, to handle the news in such a way as to minimise its detrimental effect.[9] Thus the concern shown by Steve Jenkins and Lynda Barley, namely that news of a decline in church attendance would affect the reputation of the church, seems to be consistent with a broader understanding in news handling. The notion that news handling is concerned with protecting reputation is thus not merely a finding from the present case study; it is validated by a wider survey of contemporary communication as well.

Thompson's study hints at a further important related question. He recognises that not all forms of reputation are the same, and that the content of a reputation is determined by the field in which that organisation or individual operates: a second-

---

[7] Thompson, *Political Scandal*, 248-252; see also Thompson, *Media and Modernity* and for a more popular presentation of this cultural change see Chris Genasi, *Winning Reputations: How To Be Your Own Spin Doctor* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002), 1-6.

[8] An obvious example from within the Christian tradition is the story of child abuse by priests both in North America and Europe. For a study of the US situation see Jenkins, *Pedophiles and Priests: Anatomy of a Contemporary Crisis* and for a focus group-led analysis of the impact of this and other negative stories on the church see Nick Spencer, *Beyond Belief? Barriers and Bridges to Faith Today* (London: LICC, 2003). Of course a well-planned communications strategy also has the potential to build reputation as well. See Haywood, *Manage Your Reputation*, 47ff.

[9] Haywood, *Manage Your Reputation*, 212-229.

hand car dealer will benefit from a reputation for honesty and reliability; a politician needs to be known as a person of probity and integrity.[10] With our present case study in mind, it follows that a national church needs to be recognised as playing an important role in community life and having public value. Yet it surely also follows that an individual or organisation has some degree of control over the content of the reputation they are seeking, and this has implications for the way they handle news. For example, a public school, as well as wanting to be known for effective teaching, may wish to have a reputation for getting pupils into Oxbridge; it therefore makes the numbers who get a place there each year a prominent part of a school newsletter. News can thus shape the content of a reputation as well as deplete it, and it is therefore necessary to ask what sort of reputation the Church of England wishes to have, for to engage with this question is to address some of the most fundamental aspects of news handling seen in this present case study.

In this section I have attempted to show that the issue of reputation which arises from our present case study is not just related to that particular news story or the organisation from which it originates; rather it is an example of a wider characteristic within contemporary news handling. In the context of a public discourse which places ever more worth on reputation, the handling of news, which has the capacity to deplete as well as build reputation, is not only an important activity in itself, but also a valuable area to analyse because its practice is determined by, and in turn shapes, the type of reputation that is perceived to be needed. Indeed, it is the *content* of a desired reputation that raises the most pertinent theological questions. In this case study the news was so handled as to protect a reputation of strength, vitality and public worth. My experience as a minister within the Christian church suggests that this priority is not unusual; not surprisingly, given the communicative climate and rising importance of reputation,

---

[10] Thompson, *Political Scandal*, 246-247.

there seems to be a general desire among Christians to conform to the secular canons of success and achievement in the way they handle news. Further study would be required to prove this trend but the questions for all Christians handling news, whether on a national or local level, are important ones: in a world where communication officers are 'reputation managers' is there a distinct Christian perspective on the value and nature of reputation? What reputation is the Christian church seeking for itself? It is hoped that an analysis of the role of reputation in Paul's cruciform news might shed some light on this critical area of contemporary communication, and that our conclusions will reach beyond the narrow focus of our original case study to a range of Christian communication undertaken today.

8.2.2. Reputation, Paul and Cruciform News

How might Paul's understanding and practice of news handling in his Corinthian correspondence inform a theological understanding of reputation and its relationship with news? In addressing this question two preliminary points should be borne in mind.

First, Paul was writing to a church located in a city where reputation already mattered very much. The sophistic movement in Corinth, already examined in this thesis, comprised speakers who sought through their rhetorical brilliance to win for themselves the approval of their audience, knowing that that way lay enhanced reputation and pecuniary gain.[11] A sophist's arrival in a city was therefore designed to establish a good public image as quickly as possible. Bruce Winter argues that Paul's account of his coming to Corinth in 1 Corinthians 2:1-5 betrays an awareness of this practice;[12] he is thus likely to have been fully aware of how important reputation was both in the city of Corinth and in its church.[13]

---

[11] Winter, *Philo and Paul*, 149-151.

[12] Ibid., 155-161.

[13] See also the discussion above about the role of status in Corinthian society.

Second, Paul was very conscious throughout his relationship with the Corinthian church, but especially in the period surrounding the writing of 2 Corinthians, that his reputation as an apostle was being seriously questioned. As detailed more fully in chapter three, Timothy Savage lists four specific areas in which the Corinthians find fault with Paul: his refusal to boast, his physical presence, his speech and his refusal to accept financial support.[14] To this could be added Paul's vacillation over his plans to travel to Corinth, a position he feels the need to defend in 2 Corinthians 1:15-2:4; here Paul's reputation as a reliable and trustworthy apostle seems to be being doubted.[15] It is for this reason that much of 2 Corinthians, and some of 1 Corinthians as well, take the form of an apologia for Paul's apostolic ministry; he senses the need to defend himself against a more sustained critique than he had ever experienced.[16]

Given that Paul was in a context where reputation mattered a great deal and where his own apostolic reputation was being questioned, it will be particularly illuminating to consider the way his concern for his own standing in Corinth is expressed in the news he shares most often, that of his own hardship and suffering. I argue below that the apostle Paul had an understanding of status and image which ran counter to the prevailing pattern in Corinth, and that Paul's regard to both the content and importance of reputation was heavily influenced instead by his own theological model, centred on the cross of Christ.

It is the content of the reputation Paul is seeking for himself that is so distinctive. The fact that Paul repeatedly shares stories of his own hardship and suffering suggests that he was more concerned to establish his credentials as a suffering disciple of Jesus than as a successful public speaker. By focusing on his own

---

[14] Savage, *Power through Weakness*, 54-99.

[15] Martin, *2 Corinthians*, 30-40.

[16] For a recent perspective on this see Paul Barnett, "Paul, Apologist to the Corinthians," in *Paul and the Corinthians: Studies on a Community in Conflict: Essays in Honour of Margaret Thrall*, ed. Trevor Burke and J. Keith Elliott (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 313-326.

brokenness Paul is portraying a radically different image than that which was current in sophistic Corinth. This distinction is expressed forcefully in 1 Corinthians 4:9-13 where Paul contrasts his position of humiliation and weakness with the Corinthians' riches and honour. Through listing his own hardships, especially in such antithetical terms, Paul is highlighting the difference in his standing in society with that of the believers in Corinth, apparently enjoying all the blessings of the Messianic age.[17] Paul thus narrates tales of his own privations in order to communicate how he knows he is seen in the world; by so doing he indicates that he is entirely content to have a reputation of brokenness and suffering.

However, it is in 2 Corinthians 11:23-33 where Paul conveys most fully this fundamentally counter-cultural understanding of reputation. 2 Corinthians 10-13 comprises Paul's spirited defence of his ministry in the light of the apparent criticisms by the super-apostles (11:5). In a passage of sophisticated rhetoric Paul initially boasts according to the canons of spiritual success (11:16-22); whatever spiritual qualifications the super-apostles may have, Paul can beat them. However, he then subtly shifts his defence through a detailed exposition of his sufferings as an apostle (vv23-33), concluding with his humiliating escape from Damascus (vv32-33).[18] For Paul the stories that comprise his reputation are stories of weakness, not strength (v30). It is almost as if he has come face to face with worldly self-commendation, designed to achieve a reputation of honour and strength, and turns deliberately away, focusing instead on personal hardship and affliction. For despite his apparent weakness in public speaking, Paul does still have a track record that could be presented in a way that would make a name for himself for achievement and excellence; his successful record of church planting and evangelism could have

---

[17]Thiselton, *1 Corinthians*, 357-365. See especially my earlier comments above on the force of the imagery in v13b.

[18] Winter, *Philo and Paul*, 226.

been marshalled to construct a reputation of achievement and triumph.[19] Instead the reputation which Paul is seeking for himself, made clear by the stories he shares, is not one of success and strength but of vulnerability and suffering.

The rationale that drives Paul's understanding of reputation is located in the cross of Christ. As I have already explored in some detail, the pattern of Paul's preaching and ministry in Corinth is best understood as being determined by the content of his theological message, namely 'Christ and him crucified' (1 Cor 2:1-5).[20] The hallmark of authentic apostolic ministry is, therefore, not success and honour, but rather conformity to the cross of Christ in hardship and costly discipleship. Thus the news which Paul shared, the stories which would create his reputation, were about hardship, deprivation and weakness rather than success, growth and strength. The evidence from this section of the Corinthian corpus is that Paul's understanding of the desired *content* of reputation ran counter to the prevailing social climate which prized achievement and praise and was instead shaped by the cross of Christ which was the heart of his gospel and the example and evidence of his faithful living. The evidence from the hardship lists suggests that Paul was fully aware that the news he shared would affect the regard others had for him; yet because the reputation he is seeking for himself, based on the cross, is not one of success but of weakness he intentionally shares news which runs counter to the prevailing pattern of communication.

One should not conclude from this evidence that reputation was of no concern to Paul; not only is he clear that the character of individual Christians matters, calling believers to be the 'aroma of Christ' (2 Cor 5:15) and 'ambassadors for Christ' (2 Cor 5:20), he is also committed to defending his reputation as an apostle, as seen in the argument of 2 Corinthians 10-12. Here Paul's concern is to demonstrate his

---

[19] Paul had a successful record of church planting and evangelism behind him. See Acts 14:1, 21; 16:5; 17:12.

[20] Winter, *Philo and Paul*, 157.

authenticity as an apostle by showing the way his own life conforms to the gospel he has preached, with the wider aim of assuring the Corinthian believers that the message they have heard and believed is reliable. He would have been fully aware that to focus on his own weakness and suffering would be to invite the ridicule of the status-obsessed Corinthians (see comments in 1 Cor 4:10 and 2 Cor 6:8), yet on a deeper level he believed that this cross-centred view of reputation would validate his own calling and mission. Thus it is the *content* of Paul's reputation that is so fundamentally transformed by his focus on the cross of Christ, and with it comes a reassessment of the importance of popular approval.

Yet if this much seems clear, transposing such a theological appreciation of reputation to contemporary news handling remains far from straightforward. In the first place, Paul was dealing with the reputation of an individual whereas much news handling (and certainly the practice at the centre of this case study) is concerned with the reputation of the church. Moreover, Paul was not addressing an established church that had a statutory role within the bureaucratic life of the nation. Finally, Paul's audience in Corinth was much smaller (though perhaps not much more sympathetic) than the different people who accessed the text as press release or web-based news story. Yet these difficulties should not form an insurmountable obstacle to our attempt to let Paul speak to contemporary Christian community. For all the discontinuity, there is one significant area of continuity. The cross, which we have identified as such a foundational idea in Paul's communication, has every reason to continue to be regarded as a normative pattern for Christian living and discipleship, both individually and corporately. C.K. Barrett, commenting on the phrase 'Christ's sufferings' from 2 Corinthians 1:5 , picks up on a phrase of Martin Luther, 'The 'holy cross' is a mark of the church.'[21] One can argue that Paul's view of reputation, drawn from the cross, deserves a hearing in today's church.

---

[21] Barrett, *Second Corinthians*, 62.

Paul's contribution to an understanding of reputation in contemporary news handling is not to suggest that reputation is unimportant; much of the thrust of the Corinthian correspondence is directed at persuading the members of the church to understand how their actions are perceived by others and behave accordingly.[22] However, the theological approach that Paul takes to reputation, as expressed in his narratives of hardship, does suggest that a more profound engagement with a Pauline theology of the cross as a framework for faithful living, both individually and corporately, might lead to a more complex understanding of reputation within the Christian church and, therefore, a more nuanced pattern of news sharing. In broad terms Paul's perspective suggests that a reputation inspired by cruciform discipleship might be more concerned with human weakness rather than human strength, with an emphasis on ongoing hardship rather than achievement. His counter-cultural example, drawn from an understanding of the cross and embodied in news about his own weakness and suffering, makes us consider whether a church which is basing its reputation on the secular canons of success, namely status, influence and power, is behaving in a way fully consistent with the costly nature of the Christian calling. The implications of this for the individual Christian might mean being less concerned to be seen as a spiritual success and more as a patient disciple who endures hardship for the sake of the gospel. For the church, local or national, it raises queries about whether it is appropriate to be seen as a community of strength and power instead of one of struggle and weakness, and with it profound questions about how the church relates to the society around it.

To ask such questions is obviously to touch deep ecclesiological questions about the nature of the church in modern society. A community shaped by the cross and known for struggle and hardship might fit more easily into a model of church that is not established and which occupies a peripheral place in the life of a post-Christian

---

[22] For example the issue of lawsuits among believers (1 Cor 6:1-8). For more on the importance of the church's reputation see McIlory, *Style or Substance* .

nation. Such an understanding of church was certainly not displayed during this case study; the position of the Church of England as the established church (and its physical position in Westminster) seemed to influence its desire to be regarded as a body of significance and importance in national life. It is not easy to see how the Church of England might embrace a cross-shaped reputation, but that does not mean that Paul's challenge is not relevant, and, in a society which is becoming more secular, it may become more so.[23]

Complex though these questions are, if we ask them with Paul's view of reputation in mind, we might glimpse at how news handling could be done differently; perhaps entirely different stories would be shared. On an individual basis a cruciform understanding of reputation might lead to a person sharing how hard it is to be a Christian at that present time, a long-standing prayer that has yet to be answered, or a challenging ethical situation at work rather than listing their own recent spiritual achievements in the past week. For a church it could mean being more honest about the challenges of faithful community living instead of painting a picture of success and strength. With this case study in mind it might lead to the Church of England being less concerned with convincing the establishment, the media and itself with how important it still is, and instead recognising that significant problems of mission and evangelism have still to be tackled.[24]

---

[23] For more on models of church post-Christendom see Stanley Hauerwas, *After Christendom? How the Church Is to Behave If Freedom, Justice and a Christian Nation Are Bad Ideas* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1991), Stuart Murray, *Post-Christendom* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2004) and Stuart Murray, *Church after Christendom* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2004); Jackson, *Hope for the Church*, 56-69.

[24] It is interesting to notice that during 2006 the Church of England seemed more keen to emphasise its national importance. The National Church Institutions, which comprise three national bodies – the Archbishops' Council, the Church Commissioners for England, and the Church of England Pensions Board, developed a mission statement which was used in adverts and publicity; it emphasised the role that the church continues to play in public and community life. See also the church's use of statistics to demonstrate its own importance in the life of the nation: http://www.cofe.anglican.org/about/thechurchofenglandtoday/.

One example of such handling of statistical news is that modelled by Bob Jackson, former government statistician and now Archdeacon of Walsall and Bishop's Officer for Growth in the Diocese of Lichfield. Despite now being a senior figure within the hierarchy of the Church of England, his analysis of church attendance and other statistics is characterised by much less concern to protect the reputation of the church as a successful and important organisation within the country.[25] In a research interview he summed up his approach,

> I'm very clearly not a servant of an institution and I don't have a theology that equates the church with the kingdom, or the activity of the church with the activity of the Spirit. So, the church may serve the kingdom but God is a lot bigger than the church. Jesus will still be alive if the Church of England is dead.[26]

It is clear that for Jackson the nature and importance of the church's reputation is influenced by his understanding of the Spirit's work. The finding of this section of Pauline critique is that a focus on the cross as the hallmark of Christian reputation might lead to a similarly transformed appreciation of the importance of the church's standing in contemporary society and thus a renewed understanding of how to handle news about growth and decline.

8.3. Bad News

8.3.1. Bad News and News Handling

That this case study is, in part at least, about handling bad news should not be in doubt. Despite the positive noises made by Lynda Barley and Steve Jenkins and the upbeat nature of the news story itself (structured to emphasise the hints of growth among children and young people), the evidence from our analysis suggests that at core this was a negative news story. When the statistics themselves are consulted,

---

[25] Jackson, *Hope for the Church* and Bob Jackson, *The Road to Growth: Towards a Thriving Church* (London: Church House Publishing, 2005).

[26] Research interview, Old Alresford Place, 20 January 2004.

the picture is bleak: out of the twenty-one percentage indicators, all but two of them are negative, indicating a decline in church attendance. Average Sunday attendance for adults had fallen 4% in one year; the same measure for children and young people by 7% in two years.[27] In general the statistics would seem to confirm the findings of Peter Brierley and Bob Jackson: the Church of England is in serious decline.[28] This view was certainly the message received by the focus groups when they engaged with the story and statistics themselves; group members recognised that the figures were bad news.[29]

Such an analysis, however, raises a number of questions; in particular we need to consider two issues: what is bad news, and what is a communication professional meant to do with it? To search for a definition of bad news is to enter difficult territory; as I explored earlier in this thesis, defining news itself is a contested area in communication studies. Identifying what makes a news story 'bad news' would involve a complex debate on the interaction between certain events, journalists, media organisations, audiences and ideologies;[30] even if 'negativity' is identified as a main news value it still leaves a lot of questions unanswered.[31] I am not going to attempt a complete definition of bad news here, but some of the characteristics of this case study already examined suggest a way forward. It seems to me that one of the indications that news is bad news is the impact it has when reported on the reputation of the organisation or individual concerned, and/or certain stakeholders affected by the news story itself; if such an impact is negative, or threatens to be, then a story may be classified as bad news. To use this case study as an example,

---

[27] See Appendix 2.

[28] Brierley, *Tide Is Running Out*, 27-93; Jackson, *Hope for the Church*, 1-16. Bob Jackson confirmed my reading of this particular set of statistics in a research interview, 20 January 2004.

[29] It was interesting to note, however, that they did not necessarily find this news discouraging. Indeed, some participants voiced the wish that the bad news had been faced up to more rather than absorbed into a press release which emphasised the positive.

[30] Gans, "Deciding What's News," 235-248.

[31] Bell, *Language of News Media*, 155-158.

the news about church attendance may be classified as bad because of the damage it threatens to do to the reputation which the church is seeking in the public sphere (the concern of Steve Jenkins), and because of the message it sends to ordinary churchgoers, namely that their church is dying (the concern of Lynda Barley).[32] Thus a link may be made in an understanding of bad news between the event itself, an individual and corporate reputation and any impact on certain affected members of the audience.

What to do with bad news remains a challenging question for communication professionals; at least three broad options seem to be available. First, it is possible to seek to hide the news so that it is not made known publicly. Jo Moore, special advisor at the Department of Transport, famously said that 11 September 2001 would be a good day to 'bury' bad news; although her actions were roundly condemned, they were apparently not significantly different to some of the techniques used by other press officers at the same time.[33] Second, communication textbooks recommend managing a bad news story so that it does not become too damaging; this might involve taking immediate action such as withdrawing a product from the shelves, calling an open meeting at which views can be expressed, or suggesting that the bad news has been taken out of proportion.[34] A third approach is to acknowledge publicly how damaging the bad news has been, then

---

[32] The principle may be seen in a generic political story as well: news of nurses being made redundant in hospitals is bad news because of the damage it does to the reputation of the government as a competent manager of the NHS, and also because of the negative impact it has on the nurses themselves, as well as a possible harmful effect to local patients. This model does not require both impacts to be present to classify a news story as bad.

[33] Nyta Mann, *Moore's the worry* (BBC News Online 15 February 2002 accessed 11 November 2003); available from news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk politics/1823369.stm. There are perhaps some similarities with the practice of withholding publication of the church attendance statistics at the end of the 1990s.

[34] Roger Haywood details examples of companies that sought to manage bad news stories – both successfully and unsuccessfully. Haywood, *Manage Your Reputation*, 212-229. Tim Bell sought to protect the reputation of politicians who had extra-marital affairs by setting up photo-shoots of the minister and his wife. See Mark Hollingsworth, *Tim Bell: The Ultimate Spin Doctor* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1997).

attempt to draw a line under it and move on; this approach may be characterised as 'facing up' to the bad news. It was a strategy used by Tony Blair when mired in controversy over the donations made by Bernie Ecclestone to the Labour party; he made an appearance on the BBC programme *On The Record* and defended his record while recognising mistakes had been made.[35] These are the sorts of questions with which all people responsible for handling any sort of bad news, including Christian communicators in all their forms, have to engage on an ongoing basis.

8.3.2. Bad News, Paul and Cruciform News

What might the apostle Paul have to contribute to both an understanding of bad news and an appreciation of how to handle it? A preliminary point to make is that some aspects of this contribution will only be examined in detail during the next case study on *Alpha News*; what follows here must be regarded as background to that more thorough analysis. Nevertheless, we can be clear at this stage that the news which Paul found himself handling again and again, namely that of his own hardship and suffering, may be placed in the category of 'bad news' that is described above. The events which he narrates threaten to damage his standing in the Corinthian context of success and achievement; they would have offended the sensibilities of the believers in that city who wanted to be associated with an apostle of whom they could be proud.[36] Instead, he was just giving more ammunition to those who already thought he was not up to the heavy responsibility of apostolic ministry.[37] Moreover, it is demonstrably true that Paul does not seek to hide the bad news or even to manage it away; instead he is unashamed in his desire to bring it out into the public domain.[38] More will be said in due course about why Paul takes this approach to bad news in respect to the effect he hopes it will have on the audience. At this stage it is more appropriate to focus on what lies behind Paul's

---

[35] *Blair Apologises for Mishandling F1 Row*, (BBC News Online 17 November 1997 accessed 4 May 2006); available from news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/31780.stm.

[36] Hence the irony in 1 Corinthians 4:8-13.

[37] Cf 2 Corinthians 10:10-18.

[38] See the disclosure formula in 2 Corinthians 1:8.

singular approach to bad news; to understand this I will suggest that 1 Corinthians 1:18-25 is a key text with which to engage.

> [18]For the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. [19]For it is written, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart." [20]Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? [21]For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, God decided, through the foolishness of our proclamation, to save those who believe. [22]For Jews demand signs and Greeks desire wisdom, [23]but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, [24]but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. [25]For God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength.

Before I look at the passage in more detail, I need to defend why I am straying outside the hardship narratives that are the specific focus for this thesis. I am doing so because this passage is a vital text with which to engage in order to understand why Paul himself shares news that appears to be negative. Although I have referred to it already, and the passage has a richness that mitigates against brief comment, I wish to focus on one key aspect with relation to the category of bad news. The theme of the passage is introduced in v18; Paul sets up the contrast which he will return to in the following verses, namely, the differing responses to the message of the cross.[39] This distinction is referred to most explicitly in v22 as Paul describes how the cross fails to meet the expectations of both Jew and Greek. The Jews demand signs (in keeping with the pattern of salvation history);[40] the Greeks desire wisdom (according to their pattern of learning).[41] Both are disappointed (v23): as Thiselton comments, for the Jews 'the disgraceful and humiliating execution of a Jewish teacher by the occupying power hardly seemed to constitute a sign of God's

---

[39] Thiselton, *1 Corinthians*, 158; Schrage, *Der erste Brief*, 165.

[40] Thiselton, *1 Corinthians*, 170.

[41] Ibid., 161.

saving action';[42] for the Greeks their world view of achievement, success, and honour made them regard the cross as folly.[43] It seems reasonable to suggest that to both groups the cross appears bad news; it collides with their expectations of the saving work of God, whose reputation is brought into question.[44]

And yet this bad news turns out to be anything but (v24); to those who have responded in faith it is 'the power of God and wisdom of God' (also v18). The cross, ostensibly a symbol of humiliation and foolishness, is the manifestation of God's work in the world; it comprises the very heart of Paul's gospel (1 Cor 2:2). This discovery, that God uses foolishness to show wisdom, weakness to show strength (v27), forces Paul to see the world through different eyes; it makes him reconsider the importance of social standing (1:26-31) and the value of excellence of speech (2:1-5). On a deeper level it opens him up to the possibility that weakness, shame, dishonour – all the things that would normally represent bad news – might actually represent news that is very good indeed. The cross has displayed to Paul a paradoxical world view, where all is not necessarily what it seems. As Thiselton notes, 'In Paul's theology the cross is more than (but not less then) a remedy and atonement for past sins. It provides the basis for Christian identity and his transformative power to reshape Christian existence in the present and the future'.[45] This 'transformative power' involves seeing good news where there only appears to be bad, for such is the nature of the cross and Paul's gospel itself; it was such an understanding that dominated Paul's communication with the Corinthian church.

It is possible, therefore, to sketch two aspects of the Pauline challenge to a contemporary understanding of bad news, while recognising that more will be said in the next case study. First, Paul would add some weight to the argument which

---

[42] Ibid., 170.

[43] Schrage, *Der erste Brief*, 183.

[44] Hence the reference to 'God's foolishness' (v25), for as such was it perceived.

[45] Thiselton, *1 Corinthians*, 47.

says that facing up to bad news is a wise approach for the Christian communicator. This is the view suggested by Bob Jackson with respect to statistics, arguing that to do so creates the opportunity for significant engagement with the real issues.

> There has also been a tendency recently to emphasize the good news about the Church and downplay the bad, in order to promote a good image of the institution in the press and in the country. This is an understandable temptation, but it doesn't work, partly because the press are not stupid, and partly because it is still failing to address the problem. We need to face up to our problems, not spin away from them.[46]

Second, Paul's understanding of bad news (if I can describe it thus), which was transformed by the message of the cross, might lead to the reflection today that bad news is not all that it seems. For the Christian who sees in the humiliated, crucified Messiah 'the power of God and the wisdom of God', there can always be the expectation that bad news can turn out to be a message of hope. Such has been the experience of Bob Jackson, who in tracing honestly the statistical decline in the Church of England finds reason to write of the church having a hope;[47] it remains possible for the national church to take such an approach with handling statistical news, but to do so would require leadership from a high level.[48] Whatever the practical implications, and we will look at those in more detail in due course, the suggestion from Paul's view of the cross remains that the reporting of bad news has the potential to be a lot more complex than we might think; perhaps it is not to be feared so much as is currently the case.

---

[46] Jackson, *Hope for the Church*, 21-22.

[47] Indeed he comments, 'The Christian faith is all about good news arising out of bad news' Ibid., 1.

[48] Of course, such a reflection does not suggest that *all* bad news is good. The story of a vicar running off with the choir mistress is certainly bad news according to my earlier definition (the reputation of the local church is damaged and a number of people are hurt); and it would be naive to see a message of hope in that situation.

8.4. Conclusions

In this chapter I have undertaken a critique of the twin themes of reputation and bad news from the perspective of Paul's communicative behaviour to the Corinthian church, the aim being not only to shed light on the particular text under present consideration - the Church of England's handling of church attendance statistics - but also on wider aspects of contemporary news handling. I argued first, and with recourse to the work of John B. Thompson, that reputation is a commodity of growing significance within the political and cultural climate; moreover, because news stories have the capacity to deplete as well as build reputation the relationship between reputation and news handling is a complex one, as could be seen in the news handling process undertaken by Lynda Barley and Steve Jenkins. I further argued that the particular perspective offered by the apostle Paul and his cruciform model of handling news is not that reputation as a commodity is unimportant, but rather that the content of the desired reputation was itself transformed by the wish to be known for embodying the sufferings of Christ. Through a consistent pattern of sharing news of his own sufferings, Paul is embodying the desire for a reputation for weakness, because in that cross-centred reputation is Paul's authenticity as an apostle of 'Christ and him crucified' to be found.

The challenge which Paul's example throws down is thus for the wider church to reconsider what sort of reputation the Church of England – and any Christian organisation - is seeking for itself, and what relationship that desired reputation has with key elements of the Christian gospel. Is it consistent to believe in a crucified Christ and still want to be known as a successful, high-achieving organisation? For Paul the prime concern is for his reputation to reflect the crucified Christ; does the Western church, as Charles Cousar suggests, display a concern for reputation more in line with a 'militant, exalted Christ'?[49] Might a focus on the cross of Christ not temper some of the more triumphalistic representations which are present in the

---

[49] Cousar, *Theology of the Cross*, 4.

Christian world? With respect to the way the Church of England handles attendance statistics, one is forced to ask whether a concern for protecting the established position of the national church is not brought into question by a theology of the cross which prioritises human weakness over achievement. The answers to these questions are not straightforward, but the theological foundation to Paul's example suggests they are important issues with which to engage as part of the news handling process.

The critique of bad news was rather more provisional in nature, partly because it was such a broad and nebulous area to examine, and partly because it touched on areas which will be examined in more detail in the next case study. Nevertheless, I did argue that news which promises a negative impact either on the reputation of an organisation or individual, or on the well-being of a person or group of people, carries with it a sense of fear for those charged with handling news. Stories which are negative are understood to be a problem which needs a professional approach. I argued that, notwithstanding the previous discussion of reputation, there is much that is understandable here, but the example of the apostle Paul gives pause for thought in one particular area. I showed how in 1 Corinthians 1:18-25 Paul is clear that the cross appears to both Jew and Gentile as bad news; the crucified Messiah collides with all their expectations and appears foolishness to them. Paul's argument, however, is that what appears bad is in fact the 'power of God'. I concluded by suggesting that a renewed focus on Paul's theology of the cross might lead to a reassessment of whether all bad news has to have a negative impact, and whether that which appears negative might not sometimes be the path to greater hope. In terms of handling church attendance statistics, I showed with reference to Bob Jackson that another model of facing up to bad news can be a very hopeful and transforming approach.

At the beginning of this case study I set out to show that Paul's example of news handling in Corinth might enable a theological critique to be made of the way the

Church of England handles attendance statistics and to look at the wider issues this case study raises. Such a critique has not been without its complexities; we have had to acknowledge the very different situation the individual Paul found himself in compared to the established Church of England. Nevertheless, it has been possible to see how Paul's focus on the cross of Christ as the pattern for his communication enables a reassessment to be made of the theological implications of reputation and handling bad news. Paul's example suggests that greater coherency may be found between the communicative model which the church lives out in its news handling and the nature of the gospel it proclaims. The next study will draw on this finding and assess whether it is true with respect to another area of contemporary news handling.

9. HANDLING SUCCESS: HOLY TRINITY BROMPTON AND *ALPHA NEWS*: (1) ANALYSIS

9.1. Introduction

This second case study seeks to build on the findings of the previous two chapters and demonstrate how the communicative behaviour and theory of the apostle Paul might enable a theological analysis to be made of contemporary news handling. Our focus in this case study will be an edition of *Alpha News*, a publication produced by Holy Trinity Brompton (HTB) about the Alpha course and widely distributed within the UK and worldwide. This opening chapter will set out the background to *Alpha News* and then analyse the process by which it is produced and received, seeking to draw out both the main themes in its production and some characteristics of how it is read by lay and clergy people alike.

9.2. Background

The Alpha course, a twelve week Christian initiation course whose origins lie at Holy Trinity Brompton, London, but whose reach is now worldwide, is attracting increasing scholarly attention. Originally critical comment came from those within the church whose analysis was based on the perceived theological shortcomings of the course.[1] In recent years, however, these voices have been joined by scholars from the spheres of sociology of religion and education who, in assessing the course

---

[1] This comment came from different traditions within the church. For a critique from a liberal Catholic tradition see Martyn Percy, "'Join-the-dots' Christianity: Assessing ALPHA," *Reviews in Religion and Theology*, no. 3 (1997) (and a sharp response in Markus Bockmuehl, "'Dotty' Christianity: Assessing Percy on Alpha," *Reviews in Religion and Theology*, no. 1 (1998)). Assessments from a more conservative Protestant perspective include Elizabeth McDonald, *Alpha: New Life or New Lifestyle? A Biblical Assessment of the Alpha Course* (Cambridge: St Matthew Publications, 1996) and Chris Hand, *Falling short? The Alpha Course Examined* (Epsom: Day One, 1998). It is not the job of this thesis to adopt a theological position on the shape of the Alpha course (and the criticisms above seem to say more about the writer than the course they are reviewing); however some general comments will be made in the later Pauline critique.

using empirical data, sociological frameworks and educational theory, have suggested, among other things, that Alpha should be recognised as a phenomenon of growing significance within the church, one that reveals much about the contemporary spiritual marketplace.[2] Stephen Hunt concludes his study, the most thorough on Alpha to date, 'Alpha is thoroughly modern or, if one prefers, post-modern. In many ways it is a barometer of developments and thinking in the contemporary church.'[3]

This would seem to be an initial reason for studying the communicative strategy of Alpha, embodied in its own newspaper, *Alpha News*.[4] If the Alpha course itself functions as a symbol of wider trends within today's church, then a reasonable expectation would be that a study of news handling within Alpha would also uncover questions of broader significance for Christian communication, questions on which the apostle Paul might well shed some theological light.[5] Indeed, while

---

[2] Stephen Hunt, *Anyone for Alpha? Evangelism in a Post-Christian Society* (Darton, Longman and Todd, 2001) comprises a pilot empirical study on which later work is based. See Stephen Hunt, *The Alpha Enterprise: Evangelism in a Post-Christian Era* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004) which is an assessment of Alpha from a sociologist of religion, drawing on extensive interviews with Alpha practitioners and survey data from guests on the course. An educational perspective is adopted by Stephen Brian, "The *Alpha* Course: An Analysis of its Claim to Offer an Educational Course on 'The Meaning of Life'" (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Surrey, 2003). Hunt in particular draws attention to the rapid growth of Alpha as a resource used nationally and internationally (7,000 courses running in UK 2004, 20,000 worldwide in 130 countries), its apparent universal appeal across different churches, and its high profile within UK church life. Hunt, *Alpha Enterprise*, 1-14.

[3] Hunt, *Alpha Enterprise*, 250.

[4] Attention is drawn by scholars to the resources invested in Alpha's communication strategy, be it in its publications to go alongside the course, its national advertisements on posters and in cinemas, together with *Alpha News*. See Brian, "The *Alpha* Course", 68-98 and Hunt, *Alpha Enterprise*, 5. Also popular comment in Maev Kennedy, "God gets glitzy as Christians hit silver screen" *Guardian*, 10 September 2005, 5.

[5] Indeed, in an early illuminating study Pete Ward suggests that Alpha is an example of a more general trend - the 'McDonaldisation of religion' – in which efficiency, calculability, predictability and control characterise the dissemination of spiritual knowledge and experience. Pete Ward, "Alpha - The McDonaldisation of Religion?," *Anvil* 15, no. 4 (1998). Even as fierce a critic as Martyn Percy is constrained to recognise the importance of Alpha in the church. In a foreword to Stephen Hunt's later work, he admits that his previous criticism was perhaps too harsh, and concludes 'Alpha, for all its faults, is a remarkable *tour*

there is clearly a level of discontinuity between *Alpha News* and other forms of news handling within the church, there is some continuity as well. It is true that the resources behind *Alpha News*, the size of its distribution, and its narrow subject focus set it apart from communication on a more local or regional level;[6] nevertheless the fact that it manages every aspect of the news handling process itself – from selecting the news to writing the stories and framing the presentation of them – means that it has something in common with what Christian leaders, churches and organisations are doing throughout the country as they share stories by newsletter, website or other publication. One of the starting points for this thesis was the suggestion that news handling is not an activity only done by communication professionals, but by a whole range of Christians in a number of different ways; the similarities in process between *Alpha News* and other forms of news handling indicate that an analysis of *Alpha News* will have relevance elsewhere.[7]

A further two reasons for examining *Alpha News* suggest themselves. First, by being a text largely about the growth of the Alpha course and the positive experience of people who have done Alpha, it forms a useful balance to the largely challenging news context of handling church attendance statistics. It is probably too simplistic to characterise the one as concerning good news and the other bad news, but the difference in tone is there and promises to be helpful in later critique. Second, I have heard from both clergy and laity that while it is a newspaper which is enjoyed by some, it receives a very negative response from others (not unlike Alpha itself).

---

de force. It is arguably one of the most recognizable and successful Christian brands of the twenty-first century'; in Hunt, *Alpha Enterprise*, xvi.

[6] *Alpha News* UK Edition has a distribution of 200,000; the USA and International editions are both 50,000. Published quarterly, *Alpha News* is distributed direct to Alpha supporters, clergy and as an insert to the *Church Times* and (in a modified form) the *Church of England Newspaper*.

[7] Moreover, there is some correlation here with Paul's communicative practice. I have argued that part of what the apostle was doing was sharing news about himself and his ministry; like those producing *Alpha News* and many Christians handling stories today Paul had control over the whole process – which stories to select and how to frame them.

That it engenders such a negative reaction from some suggests not only that reception analysis is likely to prove fruitful, but also that a theological critique might be of particular value.

The aim of this case study is thus to critique theologically an example of a significant Christian organisation handling news about itself, in the belief that to do so will shed light on communication that is being done by Christians on an ongoing basis in local churches and organisations. The specific focus will be the UK edition of Alpha News for March-June 2004 (Issue 33); the reason for choosing this edition was that it was the current edition when the research interviews were carried out. Through interviews with two key people at HTB I will seek to understand the issues arising from the text's production and then subject it to a detailed textual analysis. I will then analyse the response it received in the focus groups before undertaking a theological critique in the light of Paul's communication in Corinth.

9.3. Production

9.3.1. Introduction

In order to understand the production of *Alpha News* fully, it is important to set the Alpha course itself in the cultural and theological context of Holy Trinity Brompton, the church where it was first designed and which continues to be the home for Alpha International, the umbrella organisation for the Alpha course and *Alpha News*.[8] HTB (as it is known) is an Anglican church which is at the heart of the charismatic evangelical movement. Under the ministry of vicar Sandy Millar it grew into one of the largest churches in the UK, with a high public profile and a regular ministry of planting new churches throughout London.[9] Its ministry is

---

[8] For a thorough survey of the history and significance of HTB see Hunt, *Alpha Enterprise*, 15-19.

[9] HTB and Alpha have achieved significant coverage in the mainstream media, much of it broadly positive. For example Stephen Bates, "Happy-clappy way to satisfy hunger for

characterised by an emphasis given to the work and ministry of the Holy Spirit, both corporately and in the life of the individual believer. It is from this background that the distinctive emphasis in the Alpha course on the person, work and ministry of the Holy Spirit has developed.[10]

Alpha News is edited by Mark-Elsdon Dew, Communications Director for Alpha International. Formerly a Fleet Street journalist (his final post there was as foreign editor of the *Sunday Express*), Elsdon-Dew has been at HTB since 1991; from his tiny pre-fabricated office in the grounds of HTB, he heads up a large team of people involved in a wide range of communication about Alpha and associated ministries from HTB, as well as taking particular editorial responsibility for *Alpha News*. I conducted a research interview with him, and also met Sandy Millar, then Vicar of HTB,[11] and the man who has set the spiritual vision in which all Alpha communication takes place.[12] Although our conversations did focus in part on some of the specific topics in *Alpha News* 33, much of the discussion focused around the general vision and aim which the two men share for the publication.

9.3.2. Good News and Encouragement

The explicit aim of *Alpha News* is recorded on page 2 of each issue, and is 'to keep church leaders and congregations up to date with the spread of the Alpha course, an introduction to the Christian faith which has seen extraordinary success at

---

truth" *Guardian*, 24 April 2000, 9 and Victoria Combe, "Church's course feeds a spiritual hunger" *Daily Telegraph*, 26 December 2001, 8.

[10] For the actual content of the Alpha course see the book of the course: Nicky Gumbel, *Questions of Life* (Eastbourne: Kingsway, 1993).

[11] Sandy Millar retired in 2005 but was consecrated bishop by the Church of Uganda and now serves as a missionary bishop within the Diocese of London as well as Priest-in-Charge of St Mark's Tollington Park, London.

[12] Nicky Gumbel (then curate at Holy Trinity Brompton and the man largely responsible for Alpha's growth) was not prepared to see me, but his influence on Alpha communication is arguably not as extensive as Millar's. The relationship between Millar and Elsdon-Dew is clearly very strong, and, despite being interviewed at different times, they referred to each other frequently and evidently shared a common vision for the communication ministry at HTB.

stimulating faith among those who are not churchgoers and also given a new dynamism to many existing Christians'. Mark Elsdon-Dew refers to this, but it becomes clear that for both him and Sandy Millar the very straightforward aim for the paper is to get as much good news about Alpha into the public domain as possible. In the face of negative stories about the church in both secular and sacred press, Elsdon-Dew is clear about the job he has been appointed to do.

> Sandy certainly still feels that the church needs lifting up. Good news again and again and again. They need to be told, given good news. There's quite enough bad news out there. It's our job to keep giving them good news, and we've got plenty to give.[13]

Neither Elsdon-Dew nor Millar deny the reality of bad news occurring within the ministry of Alpha, but they do not see it as their job to report it.[14] Stories about the drop-off rate for Alpha courses (said by Millar to be around 25%) are not included in *Alpha News* as a matter of principle. Millar justifies this decision on theological grounds:

> And it seems to me that our job is to say what God is doing rather than what God isn't doing and therefore perhaps make everybody else feel comfortable, because he isn't doing it there either.[15]

Yet while the above quotation might imply that the function of the good news reported in *Alpha News* is to challenge those places where God is perceived not to be at work, the main function that Elsdon-Dew and Millar envisage their good news

---

[13] Research interview conducted at HTB, 23 March 2004.

[14] Elsdon-Dew and Millar are fully aware of the criticism directed at the Alpha course. Jon Ronson, the journalist who has conducted the most detailed study of the Alpha course, recalls Mark Elsdon-Dew showing him a file of all the critical things that have been written about Alpha and HTB. Nevertheless, in general they choose not focus on this. See Jon Ronson, "Catch Me If You Can" *Guardian*, 21 October 2000, Weekend Section, 10-12.

[15] Research interview conducted at HTB, 9 June 2004. This comment clearly begs a number of important questions about the nature of God's activity in the world. It will be most helpful to summarise these questions at the end of this section and then return to them in the later critique.

having is to encourage the readers of the newspaper. Millar uses the expression 'raise faith' to mean a similar thing to 'encourage', but both men believe that only good news will encourage believers in their faith. Because people need to hear good news to be encouraged, and because *Alpha News* is about encouraging people that Alpha works and is worth committing to, the paper has a responsibility to research and publish stories about Alpha which are good news. Sandy Millar draws biblical precedent for this approach:

> Mark's skill is in interviewing people and in sniffing out a good story, by which he means and I mean a story which will raise faith. Because the enemy of course is doing his propaganda all the time, and we need to be doing God's propaganda all the time. It seems to me that's what the gospels are all about.[16]

Given the clear vision and united aim of *Alpha News* the actual task of editing the paper is relatively straightforward. Elsdon-Dew takes personal responsibility for the editing of the paper, from selecting the stories and testimonies and writing them up to ensuring they are set out correctly. He draws both on his own experience in Fleet Street and the current practice of the secular press in deciding what makes good stories and what an attractive layout is.[17] He regards statistical news as important when it has something interesting to say about the growth of Alpha, and is also keen to include endorsements of Alpha from across the ecclesiastical spectrum, partly to show how Alpha has made friends across the church. However, the heart of *Alpha News* for Elsdon-Dew is the stories of people coming to faith through Alpha; many of these testimonies go on to be published in book form as well.[18] The editorial approach behind *Alpha News* is thus a combination of different influences: the desire to give readers the good news they are perceived to need and

---

[16] Research interview, 9 June 2004.

[17] The two papers he mentions drawing from are the *Daily Mail* and the *Daily Express*.

[18] For example see Mark Elsdon-Dew, ed., *The God Who Changes Lives: Remarkable Stories of God at Work Today*, vol. 2 (London: Alpha Publications, 1998). See also Stephen Brian, "Deconstructing the Alpha Testimonies," *Theology* 108, no. 843 (2005) which is discussed further below.

want in order to be encouraged about what God is doing with Alpha, and the technical page-making and editorial skills acquired from secular journalism, together with an emphasis on personal testimony. This was the case for issue 33 of *Alpha News* as it was for the issues before and afterwards.

9.3.3. Summary

This study of how *Alpha News* is produced has stayed largely at the level of the general vision and values of the newspaper rather than any specific detail of what was included in issue 33 and why. Yet this broad survey has revealed the key dynamics which operate as every issue of *Alpha News* is put together. In particular, we have seen how the need for good news dominates what goes into the newspaper, because it is understood that this good news will be most encouraging to readers about how God is active in the world through Alpha. To use our earlier model of news, therefore, whether an event can become a story in *Alpha News* is determined by whether it conforms to the news value of 'good news'. We have further noted the importance given to testimony and also the influence on *Alpha News* of secular newspaper formats and editorial practices, with special reference to the professional background of Mark Elsdon-Dew.[19]

On a deeper level, however, our examination of the production of *Alpha News* has already raised some significant theological questions.[20] We noted that the production of *Alpha News* relies on a certain understanding of how God's work is to be identified in the world, namely that God's activity is to be seen primarily (if not

---

[19] While this latter characteristic is perhaps only true of an operation on the scale of Alpha, the priority given to good news and testimony does seem to be shared in other Christian contexts. I remember agreeing to be interviewed during a church service on a Sunday morning about the theological training I was undergoing, only to be told what answers the congregation wanted to hear, answers which gave the positive side of the story.

[20] As well as the theological questions it is worth noting the issues already emerging for the later reception analysis: is a diet of good news what the readers want? Do they find good news encouraging?

exclusively) in events and stories that have a positive outcome (good news).[21] Not only does this make one ask where God is in events which turn out unfavourably, it raises more fundamental questions about the nature of the created order, the sovereign power of God and the sphere of satanic influence. Furthermore, the production of *Alpha News* is framed by a specific appreciation of how encouragement works within the Christian faith; encouragement is achieved through having a diet of good news, in the face of bad news from the secular press. The question remains, though, whether the relationship between good news and encouragement is really as straightforward as Millar and Elsdon-Dew believe. Finally, the mention of the powerful term 'propaganda' to describe the communication in *Alpha News* raises questions about truth-telling, the relationship between communicator and audience, and the proper content of Christian news.[22] In due course these questions will be addressed as we consider the light that the apostle Paul might shed on this communicative approach; for the time being we can be clear that *Alpha News* is produced in a very different context, and according to very different criteria, than secular newspapers.[23] The task now is to examine the text which is the result.

---

[21] This is the suggestion from a personal comment made to me by Nicky Gumbel, when I met him briefly (although in the referential style of HTB he attributed the comment to Sandy Millar). He remarked 'the devil tells the bad news, we tell the good news.' Comment made after a sermon at St John's College, Durham, 13 February 2001.

[22] It remains in doubt whether Sandy Millar was aware of the strength of the term when he used it (see Jacques Ellul, *Propaganda: the Formation of Men's Attitudes*, trans. Konrad Keller and Jean Lerner (New York: Vintage, 1973)), but the questions raised by its use still hold. The term is also used by Stephen Brian to describe the testimonies in *Alpha News*: 'It is, in fact, difficult not to see the testimonies given in Alpha News as essentially propagandist in nature'. Brian, "Deconstructing the Alpha Testimonies," 202.

[23] To note the theological priorities which make *Alpha News* distinct from secular newspapers is not to forget the elements of continuity. As will be explored more below Mark Elsdon-Dew's Fleet Street background comes across in the way the newspaper is constructed, and to be around the *Alpha News* office is to experience something of the pressure of deadlines that is part of any newspaper office.

9.4. Text

9.4.1. Introduction

Having analysed the key aspects of the production phase, it is now possible to approach the text itself. Unlike the other text under consideration in this thesis, *Alpha News* 33 is a lengthy document, running to thirty-six pages, and thus the textual analysis will be shaped slightly differently. After taking an initial structural view of the newspaper, I will pick up on one of the frames from the production analysis and examine how the newspaper can be understood as purveyor of good news.

As could perhaps be expected from the background and comments of the editor, *Alpha News* is tabloid in format; with banner headlines, large picture, personal by-lines and wide columns it has the production style of the *Daily Mail* or *Daily Express*. The paper is strikingly professional in its style and format, especially when compared to some other forms of Christian communication in the UK which can often be rather dull; *Alpha News* is an attractive, easy and engaging read.[24] Yet despite the visual similarity to a mainstream newspaper, there are crucial differences between the Alpha publication and Fleet Street tabloid papers; there is no analysis, debate, opinion, letters or quizzes. What remains in effect is more a newsletter, even if the format is more of a newspaper. The news that comprises the content fits broadly into three categories:[25] the first comprises stories about the Alpha course itself, its development and profile;[26] the second, news stories which are not directly about Alpha but which refer either to news about HTB, its clergy or other people related to Alpha;[27] the final group consists of personal testimonies,

---

[24] These high production values function as a preparation for the positive tone of the paper.

[25] All page references in this section refer to *Alpha News*, (Issue 33, March-June 2004).

[26] For example stories about the first Youth Alpha conference (p1), plans for the September UK invitation (p2) and an Alpha Caring for Ex-Offenders Conference (pp4-5).

[27] So Nicky Gumbel meeting the Pope (p7), Sandy Millar speaking at the enthronement of the new Anglican Archbishop of Uganda (p23), and Willow Creek leader Bill Hybels commending Nicky Gumbel at a recent joint Willow Creek / Alpha conference (p11).

either of people who have become Christians through attending an Alpha Course, or Christians who invited friends along, or again church leaders who have seen their church grow as a result of running an Alpha course.[28] There is a broadly equal distribution of these three types of stories across the newspaper, with slightly fewer from the second category, and yet owing to their length the testimonies dominate the space in the paper.

9.4.2. Good News

A structural analysis of the paper, however, only goes so far in identifying what is going on in the text. It may lead to an appreciation of the different news stories present in the newspaper, but it does not necessarily disclose the more subtle ways in which the editor ensures that the tenor of the publication remains a positive one.[29] I want to suggest that there are four different ways in which the text reinforces the overall message that Alpha is good news.

A primary expression of positive news is found in the stories reporting the ongoing growth of the Alpha course itself, which is presented as growing significantly both nationally and worldwide. The writers of the newspaper rely heavily on numbers and statistics to reinforce the size, impact and growth of the Alpha course; figures are referred to early on in stories in order to reinforce the message that Alpha is a phenomenon growing in significance.[30] With its emphasis on size, significance and

---

[28] See more thorough analysis below.

[29] Indeed a negative tone appears in only two places: in the personal testimonies of people describing their lives before they did the Alpha course and became a Christian, and in the statement by Sandy Millar about Ben Freeman, whose testimony published in a previous edition of Alpha News had now been found to be false (p6). That that statement is so strikingly different in tone merely serves to reinforce the overall feel of the paper, which is positive and upbeat in every respect.

[30] For example the headline 'Youth Alpha takes off as 750 attend conference' (p1). It is true that in this edition there are no stories about the percentage rise in adult awareness of the Alpha course, but the general message of growth is still there; indeed, the spread of the Alpha course worldwide is listed in a table on page two (although the old measure of the number of courses registered in the UK has apparently been dropped, perhaps because, as Stephen Hunt notes, the 1998 Alpha initiative marked the height of Alpha's impact in

reach, the text betrays a confidence that Alpha will continue to spread around the world, indeed, that there is something about the Alpha course that makes growth inevitable.[31] Pete Ward describes this characteristic of Alpha communication as 'calculability' and argues it is one of the ways in which Alpha has taken on the language of the surrounding corporate culture: 'Alpha measures its success and presents itself for approval primarily on the basis of numerical success.'[32] The good news that the paper exists to disseminate is this, that the Alpha course can be shown to be working by various measurable results.

Another manifestation of this optimistic tone can be found in the testimonies which are such an important part of the paper's approach. In a sense the testimonies in *Alpha News* show considerable signs of diversity, both in subject (new Christians, helpers on Alpha courses and clergy), as well as in age, geographical location and socio-economic background. However, there is a unity of form that is common to all the testimonies; they describe a problem in some detail (dysfunctional life, church struggling to grow) before going on to describe how the Alpha course has made such a difference and how their life/church is so much better now.[33] The testimonies (and in particular the dramatic stories of conversion which are the majority) thus function as good news made flesh; with their almost universally happy endings they serve as practical and living examples of the hope and

---

churches, and the number of courses has been declining since then. See Hunt, *Alpha Enterprise*, 11).

[31] The mission statement on page two explicitly states that *Alpha News* aims to keep readers up to date with the spread of the Alpha course which has seen 'extraordinary success'.

[32] Ward, "McDonaldisation," 282.

[33] A similar point is made by Stephen Brian in a thorough study in which he analyses thirty-six testimonies over seven issues of *Alpha News*. He identifies an eight-stage framework into which most of the testimonies can be fitted and describes some form of degradation as forming part of the journey to an improvement of life situation via the Alpha course. He concludes that the homogeneity between the testimonies renders them open to the charge of being propagandist in nature, but he apparently fails to realise that despite the personal by-lines each testimony is written by Mark Elsdon-Dew, thus accounting for many of the similarities in tone and style. Brian, "Deconstructing the Alpha Testimonies," 57-67.

excitement referred to elsewhere in the newspaper.[34] Furthermore, because any vocabulary of difficulty or struggle is restricted to the 'before' part of the testimonies, the reader is left with the good news that through Alpha lives and churches remain changed for the better.

This 'feel-good factor' is further reinforced by the use of personal endorsements. Many of the news stories recount direct commendation for the Alpha course from a variety of church and other leaders; indeed in some of these stories these endorsements are at the heart of what the story is about.[35] There also seems to be an attempt to achieve endorsement by association: a circumstantial connection is made between Tony Blair and Nicky Gumbel appearing an hour apart on the BBC Radio 2 Jeremy Vine programme,[36] and a visual connection between Nicky Gumbel pictured meeting Pope John Paul II.[37] These endorsements, which are clearly so important to the format of *Alpha News*, are an attempt to communicate not only the good news that Alpha has a growing number of friends throughout the church and secular worlds, but also that it is becoming an acceptable part of British life, and a vital part of church culture.[38] They seem designed to inspire confidence in those considering running an Alpha course, the implied message being that Alpha is now

---

[34] Brian correctly identifies the significance within evangelicalism of the conversion narrative (Ibid. 199). Not only is it a crucial way of publicly marking one's entry into the community of the faithful, it also reinforces the community's own understanding of what it means to be a Christian. Conversion remains, of course, a contested area of research. For a helpful review of the main outlines of the debate, including a comment on Alpha conversions, see the introduction by the editor in Martyn Percy, ed., *Previous Convictions* (London: SPCK, 2000). For an influential text within the Christian community see John Finney, *Finding Faith Today: How Does It Happen?* (Swindon: British and Foreign Bible Society, 1992).

[35] Alpha is praised by, among others, Ellie Roy, the government's Director of Crime Reduction, Joel Edwards, General Secretary of the Evangelical Alliance and Cardinal Philippe Barbarin, Archbishop of Lyon. The praise is extended to Nicky Gumbel in the comments by US church leader Bill Hybels (p11).

[36] p3.

[37] p7.

[38] Hunt, *Alpha Enterprise*, 110 and also Percy, "'Join-the-dots' Christianity," 17.

mainstream, that is, accepted by a large part of the church and wider society.[39] Therefore, the good news in *Alpha News* is as much about the growing brand acceptance of the Alpha course as it is about the lives that have been changed through the course.[40]

Finally, the good news about Alpha finds its human focus in the person of Nicky Gumbel. Gumbel dominates the newspaper in a number of ways: a fifth of the photos in the paper include his face;[41] stories are written about his media and public profile;[42] there is direct praise of his ministry in comments from other church leaders;[43] and comments from guests in testimonies and interviews include references to how helpful his videos and ministry were in helping people come to Christian faith.[44] Thus Gumbel's profile is high throughout the paper, both visually and textually, and the positive comments made about him present him as an embodiment of the upbeat tone which underlies the style of *Alpha News*. This

---

[39] If I have read these endorsements correctly they would form part of the wider Alpha strategy to raise the profile of the Alpha course nationally, particularly via a poster campaign and cinema advertising. This aim received a boost in 2001 when ITV screened a ten-part documentary series on the Alpha course. Entitled 'Alpha: Will It Change Their Lives?' and hosted by Sir David Frost it was a considerable source of pride for the Alpha team. See Hunt, *Alpha Enterprise*, 13.

[40] For more reflection on the links between Alpha and corporate branding see Ward, "McDonaldisation," 283-284.

[41] Eight pictures out of forty.

[42] For example, his appearance on BBC Radio 2 (p3), his meeting Pope John Paul II(p7) and a feature in the *Church Times* (p23).

[43] The most striking example of this is the fulsome praise from Bill Hybels, Senior Pastor of Willow Creek Community Church: 'In the United States, we have a saying, and it's a very positive term for someone's genuineness – we say, 'He's the real deal.' He or she has integrity; they are genuine people. And Nicky Gumbel is the real deal.' (p11) The whole story is based around Bill Hybels' endorsement of Alpha in general and Nicky Gumbel in particular.

[44] For example a guest called Paul, interviewed on the BBC World Service and reported on p6: 'I thought he was a really good speaker. He spoke really well and I'd heard he was good.'

explains the inclusion in the text of stories which are apparently not about Alpha; a good news story about Nicky Gumbel is presented as good news for Alpha.[45]

9.4.3. Summary

We have seen that as a text *Alpha News* 33 comprises exactly what Mark Elsdon-Dew and Sandy Millar are aiming for, namely a diet of uniformly good news. Stories are selected and framed to maximise the emphasis on positive publicity for Alpha. This sort of news is expressed through different categories of stories, as well as both textually and visually; thus the positive message is reinforced in a number of ways. The question that remains, however, is whether the diet of upbeat stories we have identified in the text produces the response that Elsdon-Dew and Millar are hoping for and expect; that is to say, is the good news in *Alpha News* encouraging? It is for this key question that our reception analysis will be so important, and it is to this task that we now turn.

9.5. Reception

9.5.1. Introduction

Our aim in this section is to answer a simple question: does the good news which comprises the content of *Alpha News* encourage those who read it? It is this response that Mark Elsdon-Dew and Sandy Millar are aiming for in their vision for the newspaper; they believe that enabling the good news stories to be told and heard will result in the readers being encouraged at what God has done and is

---

[45] There is material for considerable reflection here on the role of charisma in Nicky Gumbel's leadership and profile. Martyn Percy suggests a model for understanding charisma in churches similar to HTB, but we do not have space to take up his argument here. Martyn Percy, *Words, Wonders and Power: Understanding Contemporary Christian Fundamentalism and Revivalism* (London: SPCK, 1996), 40-59.

doing through the Alpha course. The task for our focus groups was to put this thesis to the test.[46]

All the focus groups were characterised by a high level of engagement with the text, and an ability to discuss it reflectively and identify a number of critical questions. Indeed, a wide range of views was expressed on all aspects of *Alpha News*, and, while we must be tentative in our analysis because of the relatively small sample and consequent lack of saturation, three broad sets of responses could be identified: first, there were readers who really enjoyed reading the paper, second, readers who intensely disliked the paper because of the Alpha course itself, and third, readers who were wholly positive about Alpha but had a number of reservations, some very serious, about *Alpha News* itself. As I outline the characteristics of each set of responses, I am not imagining that these groups are completely distinct from each other; the boundaries between their responses are somewhat porous, but there is enough of value in such an approach to make some provisional conclusions appropriate.

9.5.2. Pro-*Alpha News*

> It's encouraging news.[47]
>
> Lots of great, good news. Call it whatever you want to, church, Christianity, Alpha; they are making a real difference to people's lives, actually having a positive effect.[48]

There were a number of readers of *Alpha News* who were uniformly positive about the newspaper. There were five of these in total: all had done Alpha themselves and

---

[46] Each focus group participant was sent a copy of Issue 33 of *Alpha News* a week before the focus group took place and was encouraged to take fifteen minutes to read it, but was not given any indication of how we would be approaching the discussion. When each group met together a preliminary question was asked about who had been on an Alpha course before (either as a leader or a guest), prior to wider discussion taking place.

[47] Lay person, focus group C.

[48] Clergyperson, focus group B.

all described themselves as evangelical, with one clergy person among them; at least one came from a charismatic background similar to that of HTB. This category of reader liked the format of the paper which they described as 'user-friendly' and 'professional'. They enjoyed the stories about Alpha growing, found the testimonies inspiring, and were quite content with the tone of marketing which they identified in the text. They particularly appreciated the amount of good news; one person contrasted it with the diet of bad news from other newspapers and news programmes, and said good news about people was particularly welcome. Therefore, it is fair to say these readers of *Alpha News* found the text very encouraging; the good news functioned for them in the way that the producers of the text hoped it would.

9.5.3. Anti-*Alpha News*

> It is like the propaganda you get from M&S or other companies. We are growing and successful, come and join us. I found this rather smug and complacent.[49]

There was another group of readers who took an almost visceral dislike to *Alpha News* and found almost every aspect of it unbearable. Most of the members of this group (around ten in number) had not done the Alpha course themselves and in most cases had some concerns about Alpha on theological grounds. The majority of this group described themselves as liberals, although at least one member came from a conservative evangelical background and described himself as a firm Protestant; for him HTB could do little right. They found in *Alpha News* a lot to be negative about. One participant dismissed the format as a 'Christian Daily Mail'; the tone was described variously as sugary, smug and complacent. Members of this group did not disbelieve the stories in the newspaper, but felt the way that they had been put together smacked of what at least three people described as 'propaganda'. One clergy person bemoaned the 'personality cult of Nicky Gumbel' and compared

---

[49] Clergyperson, focus group A.

the newspaper to the publications which came out of China at the time of Chairman Mao. There was a feeling that while the truth was perhaps being told, it was not the whole truth. For all the members of this group, the good news contained in the newspaper had a far from encouraging effect; it frustrated them, made them irritated and lowered their opinion of the Alpha course.

9.5.4. Pro-Alpha; Anti-*Alpha News*

> I am very much pro Alpha. I think it's a terrific thrust of evangelism. I am very much for it. It is this [holds up paper] that I'm complaining about.[50]

> I was very disappointed. Having done an Alpha course and been very moved at an Alpha course, I went through this and there was too much hype.[51]

However, there was a third group, again around ten in number, that had a response to *Alpha News* that was not at either extreme but instead was generally in the middle. This group comprised broadly people who had done Alpha themselves and used it in their churches with good effect. Thus they were largely very positive about the Alpha course, and had seen God use it to change lives, including their own. One would expect, therefore, that they would be natural candidates to appreciate the good news tone of *Alpha News* and find it encouraging as Mark Elsdon-Dew and Sandy Millar envisaged. However, for a number of reasons these readers found that the issues raised by *Alpha News* meant that they were, if anything, slightly discouraged by reading the paper. On an initial level, some found the length and professional style of the publication off-putting; one member asked why, if they wanted the paper to be encouraging, did they have to do it at such expense. On a more substantial note, questions were asked about the testimonies. One lay person who had become a Christian through Alpha said she found herself discouraged as she read the testimonies; she now considered that she

---

[50] Lay person, focus group A.

[51] Lay person, focus group D.

had not led a sufficiently bad life before coming to faith. Other people commented on how the testimonies all finished on an upbeat note. In the words of one clergyperson,

> I do enjoy reading most of it, but every time I read Alpha I just know that every story is going to have a happy ending. And I know that the most effective testimonies that we have in our church are often the ones where people say 'well God's in it, and he's doing stuff but actually there is a long way to go.' There is a sense that with a lot of these articles, life's been sorted, as a result of Alpha, and I think that is a very dangerous message in some senses. Yes, it is good to be positive, Alpha's great and it makes a massive difference, but there is a sense that it can lead to a false sense of what Alpha can and will achieve.[52]

Another clergyperson described himself as put off by the constant emphasis on large numbers and wondered why no mention was made of smaller Alpha courses which could be just as encouraging. It certainly seemed that he was not encouraged by the size of Alpha as others seem to have been. Finally, a number of readers in this group found that the diet of good news did not match up to their experience of doing Alpha. The reader who made the comment at the top of this section serves as an evangelist on a housing estate in Bournemouth. He disclosed how he had seen people come to faith through Alpha courses, and was personally very committed to running them. Yet he really struggled with *Alpha News*:

> Probably any one, or even two or three, of these articles, I would love to see them in the public's hands. But when it comes in a package like this, when it's page after page of seeing Nicky Gumbel's smiling face and how Alpha has transformed my life, how wonderful HTB is, my guard comes up, being the cynical sort of person that I am...there's no balance.[53]

Nevertheless, the above categorisation is not to suggest that reading *Alpha News* engendered in all readers in this category a litany of despond and discouragement.

---

[52] Clergyperson, focus group B.

[53] Lay person, focus A.

There were a range of views in even this group: some were mildly concerned about some aspects of the paper but were happy to read the paper from time to time; others, despite being very positive about the Alpha course itself, found the paper frustrating, disempowering and sought to avoid it.[54] What was clear, however, was that while this was a group one might have expected to be encouraged by the good news in *Alpha News*, their reaction was a lot more complex than allowed for by those responsible for producing the text. If there was a level of encouragement, this was undermined by a range of other, more negative, responses to the good news reported in the paper.

9.5.5. Summary

The reception analysis of *Alpha News* reveals some valuable insights. In terms of my initial question about good news and encouragement, we may conclude that the good news in *Alpha News* did encourage some readers; however, we must also note that the number of people for whom this was the case was relatively small (approximately 20%). Moreover, we also noted that the good news had precisely the opposite effect on some readers; those who had a negative opinion of the Alpha course before they read the newspaper were not encouraged by the good news but instead found in it further reason to criticise the course and the church it came from.

Most importantly, however, we discovered a group of people, scattered among the focus groups, who had every reason to be encouraged by *Alpha News*, and yet were not. They were supporters of Alpha, practitioners of the course, keen to see it flourish, and yet for this group the good news stories in the paper had an effect that was generally far from encouraging: the glossy format suggested marketing rather than news; the large numbers served to depress those who couldn't match them; the dramatic testimonies suggested that becoming a Christian was about sorting everything out which didn't match their experience; the emphasis on Nicky Gumbel

---

[54] What was striking was that this questioning approach to *Alpha News* was spread across all four focus groups, and came out naturally in discussion without any prompting.

was unsettling; and the brand marketing made them feel uncomfortable. They didn't hate the paper , but the unremitting good news was not really encouraging either.

This discovery of such a group of readers raises a number of interesting questions. It is my suggestion that the existence of such a group would come as a surprise to those at HTB responsible for producing the text, and we must ask whether a more thorough understanding of the audience would not be beneficial. In particular, however, this finding forces us to consider the relationship between good news and encouragement. The producers of the text assume a proportional link between the amount of good news shared and the level of encouragement achieved. Our focus group research suggests that this model is an insufficient way of understanding the relationship between good news and encouragement, and that further work will have to be done. In conclusion, our reception analysis has injected a note of complexity into a news handling process which hitherto seemed very straightforward; the production and text phases of our examination centred firmly around the need for, and impact of, good news. This reception analysis has shown us that there is more to good news than meets the eye.

9.6. Conclusions

In this chapter I have located *Alpha News* in its cultural and theological context, and suggested that, owing to the spread of Alpha as a brand throughout church life in the UK and beyond, *Alpha News* is an example of news handling that has a wide sphere of influence. I further demonstrated through production and text analysis that the newspaper embodies two priorities: first, the need to report exclusively good news about Alpha, and second, the belief that such positive stories will encourage readers to feel good about Alpha and run the course themselves. I showed finally, however, that the response to the newspaper was more complex than that envisaged by those responsible for producing the text. The evidence from the four focus groups suggested that while some people were keen readers of the

newspaper and found it encouraging, other church members, despite feeling very positive towards the Alpha course itself, had a number of reservations about *Alpha News*, finding it in many cases discouraging. It is against the background of this mixed response to *Alpha News*, and with the two themes of good news and encouragement to the fore, that a critique from the perspective of Paul's communication in Corinth will be made.

10. HANDLING SUCCESS: HOLY TRINITY BROMPTON AND *ALPHA NEWS*: (2) PAULINE CRITIQUE

10.1. Introduction

The focus of this chapter will be on the two main areas which have emerged from the discussion so far, namely, good news and encouragement. I will show why both issues touch on areas of more general theological significance in the wider sphere of news handling within the church, before exploring how through a focus on the cross as a framework for authentic communication the apostle Paul has a contribution to make to these important areas of contemporary news handling. It is not my aim to reach definitive conclusions in these broad and complex theological areas, nor to suggest that the Pauline contribution I outline is somehow a summation of the apostle's wider theological perspective. Rather, as well as demonstrating that the news handling in *Alpha News* rests on certain important theological assumptions, I want to show how the apostle Paul's theological model of communication, as expressed in the Corinthian hardship narratives, has a distinct contribution to make to these wider questions that have been raised.

10.2. Good News and the Kingdom of God

10.2.1. *Alpha News*, Good News and the Kingdom of God

In both the production and textual phase of our analysis good news was demonstrated to be a dominant theme. Not only did Mark Elsdon-Dew and Sandy Millar both regard the communication of good news as a primary role for the newspaper, but I also argued that *Alpha News* was on both a primary and a deeper level fundamentally shaped by a concern for communicating positive messages about Alpha and the wider ministry of HTB. However, we also noted that for those producing the text a definition of good news seemed to be dependent on a particular understanding of the nature of God's activity in the world. It was apparently the case that God was to be associated with certain happenings (which could broadly be defined as positive) and not with others (which were generally

negative). Because of this understanding (and also the suggestion that the devil was actually responsible for the latter category of events) it seemed to follow that good news could only involve the reporting of positive events which God could confidently be said to have enacted.

A further comment from Sandy Millar will help clarify this understanding. Although quite lengthy, it is worth quoting in full; he suggested that one of the things he regarded as important was,

> ...the development of the kingdom of God theology and the understanding that you might pray for people to be healed. The church and particularly our denomination has gone back to preaching from the gospels. Because up to then we were much stronger on the epistles which got us out of having to say, 'well of course Jesus did that then but of course he doesn't do it today.' Now we are able to say Jesus did that then, and he is the same yesterday, today and forever, so he'll do it today possibly too, so let's pray for that...The power of scripture... is not that that was what God used to do, or once did, it is what God always does when he finds faith. So we want to raise faith. That is the issue. When faith is raised, anything can happen.[1]

The key phrase to consider here is 'kingdom of God theology'. By using this expression Millar is pointing to an aspect of the charismatic movement which has been a decisive influence behind the growth of HTB.[2] It is necessary to consider this strand of theological thinking in some detail because it is highly relevant to the understanding of good news seen in *Alpha News*.

From its roots in Pentecostalism and other forms of renewal, the general charismatic movement has been characterised by a belief that, empowered by the presence of the Holy Spirit in the post-Pentecost age, the church can witness God moving in

---

[1] Research interview, 9 June 2004.

[2] For a summary of the importance of the charismatic movement on the history of HTB and Alpha, including the controversial Toronto Blessing, see Hunt, *Anyone for Alpha?*, 21-31. Along with St Michael-le-Belfry in York and St Thomas Crooks in Sheffield, HTB stands as one of the foremost charismatic churches in the UK.

powerful and miraculous ways.[3] The nature of this divine activity is understood in different ways. One expression of this theological approach is to be found in the thought and ministry of John Wimber, leader of the Association of Vineyard Churches, and a man who through his visits to charismatic churches such as HTB had a significant impact on this area of UK church life.[4] Through his writing and conferences Wimber declared that it was possible to have similar manifestations of the kingdom of God as had been visible during the ministry of Jesus.[5] Indeed as Martyn Percy has demonstrated, Wimber adopts a particular understanding of God, Jesus and the Spirit in suggesting that the ministry of Jesus should be seen as a model for the way in which the power of God could be demonstrably seen today.[6]

It is this theological emphasis that is the background to Sandy Millar's comment about looking more to the gospels for inspiration than to the letters of Paul and his stressing a level of continuity between the ministry recorded in the gospels and contemporary church experience he is looking for.[7] For churches like HTB the practical outworking of this kingdom of God theology involves giving significant emphasis to ministries of healing, deliverance and power, as well as other spiritual gifts such as tongues and prophecy.[8] Even for those who would not agree with some or many of Wimber's conclusions, the language of 'kingdom theology', and an

---

[3] Martyn Percy, *Is There a Modern Charismatic Theology?* (Oxford: Farmington Institute for Christian Studies, 1997), 6.

[4] For a thorough assessment of Wimber's theology in his historical context, see Percy, *Words, Wonder and Power* .

[5] For example see John Wimber, *The Kingdom of God* (Anaheim, Ca: Mercy Publishing, 1985).

[6] Percy, *Words, Wonder and Power*, 82-103. See also Stephen Hunt, "'Doing the Stuff': The Vineyard Connection," in *Charismatic Christianity: Sociological Perspectives*, ed. Stephen Hunt, Malcolm Hamilton, and Tony Walter (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1997), 77-96.

[7] Hunt, "'Doing the Stuff'," 84.

[8] Millar explicitly refers to healing, and this is the focus of one of the fifteen talks delivered on the Alpha course. It remains a controversial aspect of the course, together with the weekend away on the Holy Spirit. See Gumbel, *Questions of Life*, 103-147 and 199-216. It is interesting to notice the link between these manifestations of the Spirit and evangelism. Wimber argued for an understanding of evangelism based on powerful demonstrations of the Spirit's power. See John Wimber and Kevin Springer, *Power Evangelism* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1985).

expectation that the future perspectives of God's kingdom can be experienced in present reality, remain an important part of charismatic missiology.[9]

A further aspect of such a theological approach is the attention paid to the power and work of the devil.[10] Drawing on a range of gospel texts,[11] focus is given to the battle between Jesus and satanic forces, and, transposed to the present day, this has led to some charismatics adopting a world view that is essentially dualistic.[12] The ongoing battle between God and the devil is to be seen in earthly events: the work of God is to be seen in conversions, healings, life and growth; the work of the devil is associated with death, sickness, frustrations in evangelism and church decline.[13] Sandy Millar recognised that not all bad things happen because of the devil, but still referred a great deal to 'the enemy' during my interview with him. It follows from this view that if good news is about God's activity in the world, then it must include the events listed in the former category and exclude those events in the latter category; to focus on those would be to draw attention to the work of the devil.

---

[9] So Andrew Lord, *Spirit, Kingdom and Mission: A Charismatic Missiology*, Grove Renewal Series (Cambridge: Grove Books, 2002). Of course, this is all a question of degree. Christians from most traditions recognise that the kingdom is in some sense breaking into the current age, but charismatics will see this happening to a greater degree (although precisely what extent is still a matter of debate). To use a phrase employed in Pauline studies (and which we will use later), the charge is that charismatic missiology in general, and kingdom theology in particular, involve some level of over-realised eschatology.

[10] For an analysis of Wimber's own position on this see Percy, *Words, Wonder and Power*, 92-93. For a more general charismatic perspective (although one which still recognises the importance of Wimber) see Andrew Walker, "The Devil You Think You Know: Demonology and the Charismatic Movement," in *Charismatic Renewal: The Search for a Theology*, ed. Tom Smail, Nigel Wright, and Andrew Walker (London: SPCK, 1995), 86-105. Hunt, "'Doing the Stuff'," 85-87 provides a sociological commentary.

[11] For example Matthew 4:1-11; Mark 3:20-30; Luke 8:28-34.

[12] This view is taken by Nigel Wright, writing from within a charismatic tradition. See Nigel Wright, "The Theology and Methodology of 'Signs and Wonders'," in *Charismatic Renewal: The Search for a Theology*, ed. Tom Smail, Nigel Wright, and Andrew Walker (London: SPCK, 1995), 75.

[13] A graphic illustration of this view was made by Blaine Cook, a Wimber lieutenant, who commented on BBC Radio after the death from cancer of David Watson, then vicar of St. Michael-le-Belfry, York, 'Satan murdered David Watson.' Quoted in Ibid., 74.

The understanding of good news which lies behind the wider ministry of HTB and Alpha and certainly its communication in *Alpha News* is thus inextricably linked to a theological position about the nature of the kingdom of God and the respective power of God and the devil.[14] Those behind the production of *Alpha News* demonstrate a belief that the kingdom of God is to be seen in certain powerful works of God, including dramatic conversions, healings and deliverance. Taking the ministry of Jesus in the gospels as their example for this demonstration of power they also emphasise the real struggle between divine and satanic power which can be witnessed in earthly events. The result is that they have a very clear idea about the sort of things God does (or wants to do), and the sort of things he does not, and this naturally affects the way they understand news that is worth sharing. Reporting good news thus involves selecting stories according to certain limited criteria; it also means positively avoiding other stories which are understood to be directly opposed to the work of God.[15]

Before we move on it is worth noting why a Pauline critique of this theological position might have implications beyond the narrow focus of *Alpha News* itself. If, as I have argued, Millar and Elsdon-Dew's understanding of good news is based on a theological position that comes from a wider charismatic trend,[16] then it is a reasonable assumption to make that its model of communication is also shared to

---

[14] It also reflects a certain view of Pentecost. Indeed in describing a model of renewal that bears similarity to 'kingdom theology' Smail uses the term 'Pentecostal', by which he is referring to a belief that the church exercises its ministry by the power of the Spirit. Tom Smail, "The Cross and The Spirit," in *Charismatic Renewal: The Search for a Theology*, ed. Tom Smail, Nigel Wright, and Andrew Walker (London: SPCK, 1995), 55-58.

[15] It is this dualism that lies behind the comments of Nicky Gumbel ('the devil tells the bad news, we tell the good news') and Sandy Millar ('the enemy of course is doing his propaganda all the time, and we need to be doing God's propaganda all the time'.) Both statements imply that the devil is behind secular journalism and reporting, and that *Alpha News* is therefore part of a divine battle with those satanic forces.

[16] Indeed there are signs that the influence of charismatic theology (sometimes badged as 'renewal') is growing in the UK. This may be because of events such as Spring Harvest, networks such as New Wine, or even Alpha itself (Hunt, *Anyone for Alpha?*, 118).

some degree by a number of charismatic Christians across the UK.[17] Moreover, as Alpha continues to spread around the world and increase its influence as a brand of world religion, a critique of the theological issues behind its communicative behaviour has relevance and value that is wider than simply to readers of the UK edition of *Alpha News*.

10.2.2. Cruciform News and the Kingdom of God

Before considering what light might be shed on this approach to good news by the apostle Paul's news handling in Corinth, it is worth making a few preliminary points. First, a general critique of kingdom theology is a complex task and not one that we have the space to attempt here.[18] Second, I am not even suggesting that what follows is a description of a more specifically Pauline perspective on the theological issues raised by kingdom theology.[19] My specific aim is to describe how a theological model of Paul's news handling in Corinth (which I have described as cruciform news) might help us critique the definition of good news which is present in *Alpha News*, and which I have suggested is rooted in a particular understanding of the kingdom of God.

An initial step is to note the similarities between the theology and practice of the church in Corinth and that of a church which, like HTB, has a certain understanding of the kingdom of God. An obvious point of comparison might be seen in the

---

[17] We need to be clear that we are not implying that all charismatics understand 'kingdom of God' theology in the same way as outlined here. Indeed, we will see later the important contribution that some scholars from a charismatic tradition have made to this debate.

[18] Martyn Percy devotes a chapter to doing this, and his success in so doing suggests that a theological approach that is sensitive to other trends in the charismatic movement would be the most productive way forward. Percy, *Words, Wonder and Power*, 82-103. See also sympathetic critiques in Tom Smail, Nigel Wright, and Andrew Walker, eds., *Charismatic Renewal: The Search for a Theology* (London: SPCK, 1995).

[19] Although such an exercise would seem to have considerable potential. James D.G. Dunn's magisterial work on Paul's theology certainly suggests incisive contributions could be made on the subjects of the power of evil and the eschatological tension of the 'already' and the 'not yet'. See Dunn, *Theology of Paul*, 102-127 and 461-498.

manifestations of the Spirit which are behind the practices Paul refers to, and comments on, in 1 Corinthians 12:1-11 and 14:1-40; the emphasis placed on tongues and words of prophecy in each context (that is, Corinth and HTB) can be taken as a sign of a deeper desire to experience the gifts of the Holy Spirit in all their fullness.[20] A more fundamental connection may be identified, however, by examining each church's eschatological perspective. I have already argued that one of the problems Paul recognised in the Corinthian church was an over-realised eschatology;[21] in their emphasis on (and enjoyment of) the work of the Spirit the believers had neglected (or never fully comprehended) the tension between the 'already' and the 'not yet', and assumed that the future perspectives of the kingdom were more present than Paul believed to be the case. There is an obvious correlation with aspects of the kingdom theology described above; in its emphasis on the powerful works of the Spirit, teachers such as Wimber seem to overlook the future consummation of God's kingdom. It may seem strange to say about a movement which stressed continuity with the past (that is, the ministry of Jesus), but it is possible to describe the kingdom theology movement as having an over-realised eschatology; to put it bluntly, there is a lot of 'already' and very little 'not yet'.[22]

Having noted the similarities in context, we can remind ourselves of the communicative choices which Paul makes. To use a term from our current case study, Paul could have shared 'good news' which testified to the power of the 'already' in God's kingdom. He could have passed on stories of miraculous healings,[23] dramatic conversions,[24] powerful acts of God,[25] and visions,[26] as well as

---

[20] This is, of course, a hotly contested theological area into which we cannot be drawn. For more see Thiselton, *1 Corinthians*, 900-970 and 1074-1133.

[21] See 5.2.2. above.

[22] It is, of course, important not to overstress the similarities; there are important differences between the theology and practice of the church in Corinth and the thought associated with Wimber and others. One of the most striking differences is the apparent absence in the church in Corinth of any form of dualism.

[23] Acts 14:8-10; 19:11-20.

[24] Acts 16:11-15.

speaking more about his own gift of tongues.[27] Instead, as we have already noted in this study, in the Corinthian correspondence he largely refrains from reporting these things, focusing instead on stories of his own hardship, suffering and weakness.[28] I have argued that Paul does this deliberately because of his wider concern, based on the centre of his theological message, to identify the cross as the criterion for Christian living.[29] He uses news to reinforce one of his key theological concerns, indeed, to present it in different ways. With respect to our present theological discussion, it is worth bringing out three aspects of this cross-shaped perspective to news.

First, Paul's news about hardship and suffering functions as a reminder to the Corinthian church of the eschatological tension between the 'already' and the 'not yet'. In my discussion of 1 Corinthians 4:9-13 I drew attention to the immediate context in which Paul tells of his own vulnerability and travails, and emphasised the importance of *ēdē* ('already') as a clue to the Corinthians' over-realised eschatology which Paul is seeking to correct. By focusing on his own suffering Paul was reminding his readers that the world in which he (and they) lived, was one of pain

---

[25] Acts 16:16-34.

[26] Acts 16:6-10.

[27] cf. 1 Corinthians 14:18.

[28] See analysis above of 1 Corinthians 4:9-13; 2 Corinthians 1:8-11; 4:8-12; 6:3-10; 11:23-33. This is not to say that Paul never speaks of these things (see the reference to his use of tongues in 1 Cor 14:18-19 and his visions and revelations in 2 Cor 12:1-10). Nevertheless, the overall message is clear: in success-orientated and Spirit-filled Corinth the apostle had many stories to share about healing and miracles, and yet the stories he sought to share were about his own suffering and weakness.

[29] Thiselton, *1 Corinthians*, 33. It is interesting to note here a reference made by Sandy Millar to the hardship lists of Paul: 'It is not our job as it were to publicise what attacks the enemy seems to throw at us. I don't see Paul ever doing that. You know, I think now and again he gets stung into saying, look you don't understand, you know, shipwrecks and beatings, I can hold my own with the rest of that…' (Research interview, 9 June 2004). If I am correct, Paul is not 'stung' into such revelations at all, but rather shares them deliberately. Moreover, he does not generally attribute these events to the power of Satan, with the possible exception of the 'thorn in the flesh' of 2 Corinthians 12:7, although even here the thorn was given by God.

and hardship; the age of the Spirit did not mean an end to physical deprivation.[30] As I argued in chapter four, for Paul the cross is as much an eschatological event as the resurrection; to have the cross at the centre of his news sharing involves both a recognition that a new age is being ushered in, and also an understanding that that age has yet to be fully consummated. It is this balance between the 'already' and the 'not yet', expressed in the hardship lists and especially their often antithetical structure,[31] that stands in clear contrast to the future perspective implicit in kingdom theology.

Second, the news which Paul shares affirms that God is not absent in suffering, even when it is ongoing. The hardship lists of both 2 Corinthians 4:8-12 and 6:4-10 both include an antithetical structure which serves to emphasise the ongoing presence and power of God at work even as Paul endures physical and emotional difficulties. In 2 Corinthians 4:7 Paul attributes this preservation in the midst of hardship not to his own efforts but the power of God;[32] that he is not 'crushed', 'driven to despair', 'forsaken' or 'destroyed' is a testimony to divine provision.[33] There is no indication that the suffering has stopped; the use of the present tense strongly suggests that it is ongoing, as is the protection of God. This sense of God working in and through suffering is rooted in Paul's understanding of the cross; there, in apparent failure and humiliation, Paul sees not the victory of Satan and the abandonment of God, but rather the powerful, reconciling work of God coming to fruition. This understanding of suffering as the locus for divine power, not satanic attack, is critical to Paul's approach to news;[34] it stands in clear contrast to the theological

---

[30] It is significant that neither here nor elsewhere does Paul attribute this suffering to the work of Satan.

[31] So 1 Corinthians 4:12b-13a; 2 Corinthians 4:8-9; 6:8-10. By this structure Paul is affirming the power of the future kingdom breaking in; his emphasis on suffering does not mean that the present is hopeless (see immediately below).

[32] 2 Corinthians 1:8-9.

[33] 2 Corinthians 4:8-12.

[34] Of course, Paul does refer to Satan tormenting him in 2 Corinthians 13:7-9. Nevertheless, even here God's power is to be seen in the hardship, and not simply rescuing him from it.

model we examined above which identified suffering as the realm of the devil, from which true believers were to be rescued.

Third, Paul's stories of hardship reinforce the message that the hallmark of faithful living is costly discipleship. In 2 Corinthians 11:23-33 Paul, faced with a challenge to his apostolic ministry, a charge which went to the heart of his calling as a disciple, refers in greater depth than anywhere else to his own sufferings, finishing with a story of humiliation (vv32-33) which testifies to his own weakness (v31). Thus a defence of his authenticity as a minister of Christ (v23) comprises not a list of his spiritual highpoints, as the Corinthians might have understood them, but a reminder of the hardships he has endured. For Paul suffering is not the result of a lack of faith, but rather the evidence of faith, the hallmark of Christian discipleship. Again, this perspective on human weakness is rooted in the cross which Paul sees not simply as the centre point of God's redeeming work but also as the pattern for ongoing Christian living. Suffering as a Christian, therefore, is not something of which to be ashamed (as seems to be the case within the world view of *Alpha News*); rather it is a badge of faithful and authentic discipleship.

A Pauline critique of 'good news', as that term is understood by those behind *Alpha News*, is thus centred on the cross of Christ. Faced with a church not totally dissimilar in outlook to HTB, Paul chose to focus on news which in content and structure echoed the paradoxical nature of the cross. The cross had given Paul a totally different value system with which to view the vicissitudes of human existence; it gave him confidence not only of what was still to come, but also that God was at work in the midst of his own hardship, as he lived a lifestyle itself shaped by the cross. As such Paul's view of the centrality of the cross provides a critical perspective on aspects of kingdom theology: the over-realised eschatology which underemphasizes the future nature of God's kingdom, the heightened dualism which sees examples of suffering and trial as signs of satanic power, and the expectation that Christian living should be characterised by spiritual success and

victory. Paul's doctrine of the cross, as we have explored in his news to the church in Corinth, will not be the last word on kingdom theology, but it does provide an important biblical corrective to a theological approach which is, at best, only partly thought through.[35]

To reflect on Paul's communicative behaviour in Corinth in the light of *Alpha News* is thus to ask fundamental questions about the nature of good news. The suggestion is that as a category of story good news has a broader reach than either Sandy Millar or Mark Elsdon-Dew imagine. Because struggle and suffering do not have to be linked to the work of the devil, but can actually represent marks of faithful Christian living, they can be included in a category of news which seeks to reflect the work of God in the world. A struggling local church does not necessarily represent a community under satanic attack; it could be an example of faithful believers persevering in tough times. A Christian living with cancer is not necessarily a healing miracle waiting to happen, but perhaps a nascent testimony of God's care being experienced at a time of personal suffering. A newly converted believer who has found daily and family life harder since becoming a follower of Jesus may not be an example of someone who has got something very wrong, but instead very right. An understanding of good news which is shaped by the cross and not by kingdom theology might, therefore, force a radical reassessment of what is included

---

[35] It is interesting that two charismatic scholars have both sought to use the cross in a similar way. Rejecting the 'Pentecostal' model of renewal outlined above, Tom Smail argues for a 'Paschal' model, which takes seriously the cross of Christ as a way of interpreting the work of the Holy Spirit today. In a profoundly helpful article he suggests that such an approach would lend charismatic theology a theology of suffering which appreciates God's work in hardship, and not just bringing people out of it. (Smail, "The Cross and The Spirit," esp 58-70.) In a monograph with a much narrower focus, namely an empirical-theological study of *glossolalia*, Mark Cartledge suggests that an emphasis on the cross would help critique the language of power which is often associated with charismatic utterances. In so doing he recasts the term 'kingdom' in a constructive way: 'The power of the kingdom of God only makes sense when we discover the means by which that kingdom was established – namely, by the vulnerability of Christ on the cross'. (Cartledge, *Charismatic Glossolalia*, 200-203.) It is no doubt significant that one of the distinct weaknesses of John Wimber's theology was the absence of a worked-out theology of the cross. See Percy, *Words, Wonder and Power*, 96-99.

in *Alpha News*. Alongside stories of spectacular growth, dramatic stories of conversion and increasing public approval might be found stories of a church running an Alpha course with only fifteen guests, finding it hard, but keeping going; a testimony where it has not all ended happily ever after; perhaps even a nod to some of the problems encountered by Alpha worldwide. All of which might, as the next section goes on to suggest, have a very different impact altogether.

10.3. Encouragement

10.3.1. *Alpha News*, News Handling and Encouragement

The term 'encouragement' has emerged as something of a *Leitmotiv* in our study of *Alpha News*; it was certainly one of the key terms used by Sandy Millar and Mark Elsdon-Dew to describe their aim in producing the publication. It was their hope – indeed, expectation – that as readers of the newspaper encountered the various forms of good news about the Alpha course, together with its home church and leaders, they would develop a positive response to the course and be more likely to run it in their own church (or persevere in running it if they were doing so already). In order to go deeper, establishing exactly who the intended audience is will help clarify how Elsdon-Dew and Millar imagine encouragement will work. It is explicitly not their aim to persuade people already fiercely opposed to Alpha to adopt the course themselves.[36] Rather, their intended audience is two-fold: those who are already running Alpha in their church, college or prison, and those who are thinking of doing so. For the former group the content of *Alpha News* is meant to give them the confidence to keep going; for the latter group it is meant to persuade them to try out the course in their local context. Yet for both groups the relationship between good news and encouragement is essentially the same. Both Elsdon-Dew and Millar adopt a sender-receiver (or hypodermic needle) model of communication

---

[36] This does raise a question, however, about why *Alpha News* is distributed so widely via the *Church Times* and what effect it has on the many *Church Times* readers who are deeply suspicious of Alpha. Our focus group research suggests that it may alienate them from the Alpha cause still further.

whereby the content determined by the sender (in this case, good news), will have a particular impact on the relatively passive receivers (here, encouragement).[37] The more good news (that is, positive news about growth, influence and conversions) is reported, so the rationale goes, the higher the expectation of the reader will be both of the potential of the Alpha course as a form of evangelism, and the power of God to work through it. Thus the link between good news and encouragement is seen as very close indeed.[38]

The conclusion from our reception analysis, however, was that such an understanding of the relationship between good news and encouragement was, at best, insufficient. While some readers of *Alpha News* felt cheered and heartened by the positive stories in the newspaper, the majority, including those who would certainly be part of the publication's target audience, displayed a more complex and often negative response. People who are well disposed towards Alpha found various aspects of the news more troubling; the general tone of optimism was such that they either could not believe it was all true or found that it didn't match up to their experience of doing Alpha. This finding suggested that an understanding of encouragement which relies simply on providing a diet of uniformly good news seriously underestimates the range of responses a group of individuals might have to a particular message. Instead of being passive consumers of communication human beings creatively interpret messages according to a range of factors.[39] It seems that good news is not as encouraging as those behind *Alpha News* might think.

---

[37] For a helpful critique of this model of communication see Schultze, *Communicating for Life*, 45-58 and discussion in Jolyon P. Mitchell, *Visually Speaking: Radio and the Renaissance of Preaching* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999), 17ff.

[38] It would be inaccurate to suggest that both men understood encouragement exclusively in these terms. Certainly Sandy Millar, when pressed, acknowledged that testimonies of people who had done Alpha and not come to faith could also be found encouraging. Nevertheless, the values behind the production of *Alpha News* are clear: the more good news is shared, the more encouraged people will be.

[39] Schultze, *Communicating for Life*, 52.

In terms of news handling more generally, these findings are of considerable interest. Not only do they suggest that profitable enquiry could be made into the relationship between news and certain models of communication, they also confirm that audience reception analysis is a vital component in understanding the news handling process, precisely because audience responses are more complex than communicators often imagine. Moreover, the way in which the news stories are so selected and framed as to induce a certain response on the part of the audience suggests a useful study could be made of *Alpha News* from the perspective of propaganda and persuasion.[40] If a general definition of propaganda is communication done by, or on behalf of, organisations with the explicit aim of achieving a response which furthers the interest of that organisation,[41] then it is not difficult to see why such a critique would have value not only in the case of *Alpha News* but for other examples of news handling within the church.[42] Finally, the above findings are of significance because the question of encouragement (what it is and how is it achieved) seems of particular import within the Christian tradition. There is some evidence for the vital role of encouragement in building the early church,[43] and, while the body of literature on this aspect of Christian communication is not extensive,[44] anecdotal evidence from my own parochial ministry and

---

[40] This has suggested itself several times in the analysis thus far; the term propaganda was actually used by people on the production and reception sides of the communication process. This alone would merit a detailed study, but other areas of relevance to a critique of *Alpha News* as propaganda would be the role played by Nicky Gumbel as being identified as the face of Alpha, the meaning of the Christian injunction to tell the truth in the context of such communication, and the nature of audience response.

[41] See Garth Jowett and Victoria O'Donnell, *Propaganda and Persuasion*, 3rd ed. (London: Sage Publications, 1999), 6.

[42] The work of Jacques Ellul would be the obvious place to start, and especially his conclusions regarding propaganda and the church: 'Christianity disseminated by such means [propaganda] is not Christianity'. Ellul, *Propaganda*, 230.

[43] For example Acts 11:23; 15:32; 20:2; 1 Thessalonians 3:2; 3:7; 4:18.

[44] Derek Wood, *The Barnabas Factor: The Art of Encouragement* (Leicester: IVP, 1988) is a popular work on the subject, but does include a useful survey of biblical words for encouragement.

elsewhere suggests that it is a framework of encouragement that has shaped the increasing place within the church given to testimony and story.[45]

The specific question which this thesis is addressing, however, is what the apostle Paul's communication in the two extant Corinthian letters might have to contribute to this aspect of contemporary news handling. Because of this necessarily narrow focus, a critique from the perspective of propaganda, illuminating though it would be, will have to remain for another study. Instead, building on an understanding of the particular vocabulary of encouragement within the Christian tradition, I will briefly assess the relationship in Paul's news handling between the stories he chooses to share and any positive response from the audience. More particularly, while recognising that Paul does on at least one occasion within the Corinthian correspondence apparently share a positive story with the aim of achieving a certain response on the part of the Corinthian audience,[46] I will focus on the news that Paul shares about himself in the form of reports and reflections on his own hardship and sufferings - what I have described as Paul's cruciform news.

10.3.2. Paul, Encouragement and Cruciform News.

> [3]Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, [4]who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God. [5]For just as the sufferings of Christ flow over into our lives, so also through Christ our comfort overflows. [6]If we are distressed, it is for your comfort and salvation; if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which produces in you patient endurance of the same sufferings we suffer. [7]And our hope for you is firm, because we know that just as you share in our sufferings, so also you share in our comfort. (2 Corinthians 1:3-7)

---

[45] Sandy Millar referred to the growing use of testimony in church life (Research interview, 9 June 2004).

[46] See discussion above on 2 Corinthians 8 and 9, and a fine discussion by Kieran J. O'Mahony, *Pauline Persuasion: A Sounding in 2 Corinthians 8-9*, Journal for the Study of the New Testament supplement series 199 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000).

When the question of Paul and encouragement is being addressed, the passage which suggests itself most immediately – not only from the hardship texts presently under discussion but indeed from the whole Pauline corpus – is 2 Corinthians 1:3-7. The reason for this is linguistic: in these five verses the Greek term *paraklēsis* and its cognates occur ten times.[47] This term is used elsewhere by Paul in this letter to refer to encouragement he has given and received,[48] and, while some commentators prefer another rendering in this context, the fact remains that these verses are an intense reflection by the apostle Paul on the relationship between personal suffering and divine consolation;[49] if there is such a thing as godly encouragement, then this is Paul's attempt to describe it. Moreover, as outlined already above, this short passage sets the context for the apostle's initial disclosure, in this particular letter, of news about his own suffering; it sets the theological framework in which this news (and probably other news) is to be received. As I trace the ways in which Paul understands divine encouragement, significant points may be made not only about the news which immediately follows but that which is reported elsewhere in the Corinthian correspondence.

While a detailed study of these five verses would be rewarding, we must be content with noting three key points that emerge from this complex passage. First, Paul assumes that suffering is an ongoing reality not only for him, but for all Christians, including the members of the Corinthian church. That the apostle refers to his own affliction (v4a) is to be expected; a theme of both Corinthian letters is the way in which Paul's own discipleship is marked by a level of personal cost which has echoes of the death of Christ (here referred to as the 'sufferings of Christ' - v5a).[50]

---

[47] Martin, *2 Corinthians*, 9.

[48] 2 Cor 7:4, 13.

[49] Both Witherington and Thrall prefer 'comfort'. Witherington, *Conflict and Community in Corinth*, 357; Thrall, *2 Corinthians vol 1*, 102-103.

[50] For a detailed exploration of what the 'sufferings of Christ' refers to see Thrall, *2 Corinthians vol 1*, 107-110. After discussion she concludes that the phrase refers to the hardship which Paul endures as a result of his inward conformation to Christ.

Yet Paul also affirms that such suffering is not only a more general characteristic of the Christian life (v4b – 'those who are in any affliction') but is a present experience for the believers in Corinth itself (v6b – 'when you patiently endure the same sufferings that we are also enduring'). The exact nature of the Corinthians' suffering remains in doubt, but it is clear that Paul is aware they are suffering as he is.[51]

Second, Paul believes that God gives encouragement/consolation *in* this affliction, helping the individual Christian to persevere, rather than simply removing that person from their painful situation. The force of *epi* ('in') in v4 should be understood; Paul is not suggesting that God's encouragement, whatever form it takes, involves removing hardship from the way of the believer, but rather that it manifests itself while the suffering is ongoing. Indeed, in v6b Paul indicates that this divine consolation is to be received as members of the Corinthian church 'patiently endure' their challenging walk of faith; this would seem to imply that the divine *paraklēsis* is giving the grace to abide as a Christian, despite all the cost that following Christ involves.

Finally, Paul trusts that a report of this process of suffering and comfort in his own life will itself encourage those who hear of it, because it is their experience as well. Paul expects that news of his suffering and divine consolation will have a positive impact on those who hear about it (v6); he imagines that they will be encouraged by the fact that Paul is experiencing hardship as a Christian, and by the fact that he has been comforted by God and given the grace to keep going, precisely because it echoes the pattern of their own Christian discipleship (v7).[52] It is not difficult to see why this understanding of suffering and encouragement is informed by Paul's

---

[51] For a discussion of possible sufferings see Martin, *2 Corinthians*, 10.

[52] C.K. Barrett argues that this level of continuity between the experience of the apostle and the Corinthian church is one of the ongoing themes of the letter. Barrett, *Second Corinthians*, 60.

understanding of the cross as the shape of Christian living; cruciform discipleship is not a place to be rescued from, but the heart of a Spirit-filled response to the gospel.[53]

Given this framework to news about personal hardship, two aspects about the story which follows seem to stand out. First, it jars somewhat that Paul goes on to emphasise divine rescue from suffering (v10) when he has previously commended patient endurance (v6). Second, the reference to the resurrection (v9) has not been explicitly prepared in vv3-7 where the emphasis has been on a pattern of life inspired by Christ's sufferings. Yet if these points of concern are set against a careful reading of the passage, then this disclosure of news can be seen as broadly consistent with the pattern of suffering and encouragement which Paul has just outlined. That Paul had endured a period of intense hardship is very clear;[54] the reason that he seems so keen for his readers to be aware of this suffering is presumably because this news has the capacity to encourage them (v6a). Moreover, the context of the letter reminds the reader that while Paul was rescued from the life-threatening situation in Asia, this did not result in a life free from personal hardship. The reference to future rescue (v10) serves as a reminder that danger remains part of the apostle's ministry; the other hardship lists in the letter do not suggest that Paul's suffering has in any sense diminished. The reference to the 'God who raises the dead' (v9) should not be set against the emphasis on Christ's sufferings in v6; it illustrates that the cross and resurrection are always closely linked in Paul's thought, and emphasises that while Paul stresses the cross as the pattern for Christian ministry, it is always a symbol laden with hope because of the resurrection. In summary, it is possible to see Paul's model of encouragement of vv3-7 given expression in these verses as Paul's news of his own suffering and

---

[53] James D.G. Dunn explores this idea in the rest of Paul's writings; the result is a rich analysis of the relationship between the sufferings of Christ and the apostle Paul. See James D.G. Dunn, *Jesus and the Spirit: A Study of the Religious and Charismatic Experience of Jesus and the First Christians as Reflected in the New Testament* (London: SCM Press, 1975), 330-338.

[54] Even if this exact nature of the hardship is not – see earlier discussion.

divine consolation is designed to function as an encouragement to the Corinthian believers.

If we take a step back and look at Paul's model of encouragement in the light of the other hardship lists under discussion, it is possible to trace a common pattern. On a general level Paul seems to expect that news about his own suffering has the capacity to encourage those who hear it (that is, the Corinthians) for at least two reasons. First, such news affirms that suffering is not a failure of the Christian life but a hallmark of it. It is not difficult to imagine how whatever hardships the Corinthian believers were enduring engendered a sense of failure in that community which clearly prized spiritual excellence and achievement. The recurrent use by Paul, notably in 1 Corinthians 4:9-13 and 2 Corinthians 11:23-33, of news of personal suffering as a defence of his apostolic ministry serves also as a reminder to the Corinthian readers that suffering is a consequence of faithful living, not an example of spiritual failure. That the 'sufferings of Christ' are being shared by the believers in Corinth can serve as an encouragement to them.[55] Second, news about Paul's struggles affirms that suffering is not a spiritual cul-de-sac but rather a place in which God's power can be seen. 2 Corinthians 4:8-13 and 6:4-10 both emphasise the power of God in the midst of apostolic hardship.[56] While it is possible to read these antithetical constructions as a picture of the cross/resurrection balance in Paul's thought,[57] it seems to me also reasonable to see them as illustrations of the suffering/consolation paradigm from 2 Corinthians 1:3-7. Therefore, with these stories of hardship Paul reminds his readers that whatever suffering they are experiencing they can still experience divine consolation and receive God's grace to abide.

---

[55] Obviously both these passages are framed polemically and are serving a wider purpose, but our general point still stands.

[56] Dunn, *Jesus and the Spirit*, 333.

[57] E.g. Barrett, *Second Corinthians*, 63.

It should be apparent why this dual understanding of the capacity of news about suffering to encourage is closely linked in Paul's mind to the cross: not only is the pattern of the cross the model of authentic discipleship, but the cross also represents the most powerful example of God's transforming power being seen in weakness and suffering (1 Cor 1:18ff). Paul's decision to frame this aspect of his encouragement for the Corinthian church in such a way is thus a deliberate move.[58] He eschewed a model of encouragement which focused on his own success and spiritual achievement because it was not consistent with his overall theological message. Instead he shared stories of his own weakness, hoping and believing thereby that the Corinthians, who, despite their reputation for success and spiritual ecstasy were still enduring hardship for the gospel, would find this news encouraging, above all because it took them back to the heart of the gospel to which they had first responded.[59]

Not only does this finding reinforce my wider assertion that news stories played an important part in Paul's communicative strategy, it also suggests a number of implications for the relationship between news handling and encouragement. Our evidence from the Corinthian correspondence would seem to confirm that there is more to encouragement than giving people stories of success and achievement. While there is certainly no basis to suggest that stories of conversion, growth and spiritual experience are actually discouraging, Paul's example does indicate that stories of suffering and hardship can be encouraging, in particular when they reflect a pattern of living which is modelled on the cross of Christ. As our reception analysis indicated, narratives which tell of an individual abiding in Christ in the midst of illness or persecution can encourage believers to persevere themselves in

---

[58] I am not, of course, suggesting that this analysis represents a definite description of Paul's approach to encouragement (see earlier comments on 2 Cor 8-9). Nevertheless, I would suggest that it remains an important part of the overall picture.

[59] 1 Cor 2:2.

their Christian walk.[60] One of Paul's contributions to contemporary news handling, therefore, might be to indicate that efforts should be made to include a wider range of stories in Christian communication, and in particular to look for news which tells of God's work in apparent weakness. This is perhaps what Jacques Ellul was calling for when he wrote of the need for 'Christian realism', that is, a healthy sense of the brokenness of human life, especially for the Christian disciple, and a confidence in God's transforming power.[61] Such an approach would allow some different stories to be told that are currently not regarded as 'encouraging' within the Christian church, but the result might be more Christians affirmed and given hope in their Christian lives. In terms of *Alpha News*, such an understanding of encouragement might lead to some testimonies being included which do not end happily ever after, stories about the Alpha course which speak of areas where it is struggling and still needs to develop, and examples of churches which continue to run a yearly Alpha course even though only ten people come along. If that were the case, the empirical findings of our focus groups and the theological findings of our Pauline analysis suggest that more readers might be encouraged as a result.

10.4. Conclusion

In this chapter I have sought to demonstrate what light the apostle Paul's focus on the cross as the hallmark of authentic communication might shed on the two themes which have arisen from our study of *Alpha News*, namely good news and encouragement. I began by highlighting the way in which the priority given by Sandy Millar and Mark Elsdon-Dew to positive news stories rests on an understanding about the nature of God's activity in the world and the sphere of

---

[60] For a further reflection on the place of brokenness within Christian narratives see Stanley Hauerwas, with Richard Bondi, and David B. Burrell, *Truthfulness and Tragedy: Further Investigations into Christian Ethics* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1977), esp. 57-98.

[61] Jacques Ellul, *Sources and Trajectories: Eight Early Articles that Set the Stage*, trans. Marva J. Dawn (Grand Rapids, Mich: W.B. Eerdmans, 1997), 92-112.

satanic influence. Because of this, if stories are to be about God's work, they must necessarily be of success and growth; if they are not, they will be reporting the work of Satan. I went on to show how Paul, in addressing the over-realised eschatology in Corinth (which I suggested has a number of points of similarity with the kingdom of God theology referred to by Sandy Millar) takes a radically different approach. He largely eschews stories about his own success and instead focuses on stories which draw out a cross-shaped approach to news which is worth sharing. Paul's reports of his own suffering function as a reminder to the Corinthian church of the eschatological tension between the 'already' and the 'not yet', affirm that God is not absent in suffering, even when it is ongoing, and reinforce the message that the hallmark of living is costly discipleship. I concluded that to consider *Alpha News* in the light of Paul's communicative behaviour evidenced in the Corinthian hardship narratives is to engage with critical questions about the nature of good news; a cross-centred approach to handling news will result in a much broader understanding of news which is worth sharing than was appreciated by the key communicators in this case study.

With respect to encouragement I suggested that the apostle Paul had a similarly challenging contribution to make. Recognising the deficiency of a transmission model of encouragement, in which the more good news is shared, the more encouraged readers will be, I argued that Paul's handling of news, inspired by the cross, demonstrates an understanding of encouragement that is diametrically opposed to that displayed in *Alpha News*. Drawing on the key text of 2 Corinthians 1:3-7, I showed how Paul believes that news about suffering can actually encourage believers. It affirms both that suffering is not a failure of the Christian life but a hallmark of it (as a living out of the way of the cross), and also that suffering is not a dead end but rather a locus for God's power to be witnessed (as seen in the power of the cross). A theology of news handling which is rooted in the cross might result, therefore, in a more complex understanding of encouragement and thus a potentially greater range of stories which could be shared.

It was the aim of this case study to demonstrate further how the apostle Paul might contribute to a theological critique of contemporary Christian news handling. Using *Alpha News* as an important example of a Christian organisation handling the whole news process, I have been able to show not only that sharing stories involves making a number of theological assumptions – in this case about the nature of good news and the art of encouragement – but also that the Pauline model of cruciform news, as seen in the Corinthian hardship lists, provides a valuable critical perspective on some of these assumptions. The conclusion from this case study is thus not only that those behind *Alpha News* could reflect further on what stories they include and how they imagine encouragement will take place, but also that all Christians who are engaged in selecting stories to share – be they ministers, communication professionals or bloggers – and whose aim is to encourage their hearers, might consider afresh how their choices could be enriched by an understanding of the cross as a hallmark of authentic Christian news handling.

CONCLUSION

Introduction

In the conclusion to this study will I will summarise the argument, highlight the key findings, their implications and significance, and suggest further areas for study.

Summary

The task I set myself at the beginning of this study was to examine how the apostle Paul's communicative theory and behaviour might inform a critique of Christian news handling, in the belief both that Paul had been previously undervalued as a resource for contemporary Christian communication and also that Christian news handling had not been subjected to the sort of critique it warranted. In setting out this clear focus I outlined four parameters to the thesis: that this was not a study of the entire Pauline corpus but only certain texts from the Corinthian correspondence, that I was not seeking to raise all the issues involved in Christian news handling today but only a few which would hopefully have wider relevance, that I was not attempting a general ethical or theological critique of Christian news handling but was working to a narrower biblical and Pauline focus, and that I was not aiming for a number of practical recommendations but rather looking for deeper theological insights. My hope was that this study would make a contribution to Pauline studies, the use of Paul by contemporary theologians, and the general spheres of religious news and Christian communication.

In chapter one I examined the contemporary context of news and news handling. I made a case for a broad understanding of news and therefore the recognition that news handling was an activity undertaken by both professional and lay communicators in a number of settings. I also argued that the context for this practice was increasingly complex, a reality to which the rise of the use of the term 'spin' in contemporary vocabulary testifies. For many Christian communicators

engaged in handling news, of whom there are a considerable number, this challenging environment would seem to raise a range of theological questions about their communicative behaviour; moreover, as these questions have rarely been considered in the literature on religious news in general and dealing with news in particular, I suggested that such a theological critique of this practice was overdue.

Chapter two introduced Part A of the study in which the communicative theory and method of the apostle Paul was analysed. I outlined the reasons which suggest that Paul might have a distinctive contribution to make to this study: the complex nature of his own rhetorical environment as well as the importance and volume of news within the early Christian communities in which Paul was such a significant figure. Acknowledging the technical and cultural differences between the first and twenty-first centuries, I nevertheless argued for a level of similarity between the broad communicative phenomenon of news and news handling in both Paul's world and our own. After examining the types of news which Paul shared I identified the stories of his own suffering as most characteristic of his approach to news, and therefore, having considered other options, decided to take as a specific focus the hardship narratives from the Corinthian correspondence. The following chapter examined the context of the Corinthian corpus in detail and in particular drew together the evidence for the likely presence of sophistic speakers in that successful city, as well the tendency of the Corinthian church to subject their apostolic visitor to a searching critique. Against this background I examined Paul's approach to communication in Corinth as outlined in 1 Corinthians 2:1-5, a passage I described as Paul's communicative manifesto. I concluded that while Paul is not rejecting all use of rhetorical techniques in this passage, he is eschewing a form of speech which is not consistent with the settled content of his message, namely the crucified Christ. I argued that it was possible to describe this approach as 'cruciform communication'.

Chapter four comprised a study of whether Paul's handling of news in the hardship narratives in 1 and 2 Corinthians was itself consistent with the cruciform pattern he had set himself. After a detailed exegesis of five passages from the two letters I suggested that all four aspects of Paul's news – his physical suffering, emotional and human weakness, social humiliation and patient perseverance – were informed by Paul's theology of the cross; the cross determined that weakness was the place where God's power was to be seen, physical hardship was a sign of walking the way of Christ, low social standing was the result of adopting a fundamentally different value system to that in secular Corinth, and abiding in the face of adversity was a true reflection of the eschatological reality that the coming kingdom of God had yet to be consummated. It was thus my conclusion that there is both an internal and an external consistency in Paul's handling of news. The internal consistency is to be found in the way in which both the content and form of Paul's hardship narratives are shaped by the same theological paradigm, namely the cross of Christ; the external consistency is to be seen in the fact the cross plays as pivotal a role in Paul's news handling as it does in his overall communicative manifesto. I concluded that it was possible to speak of Paul's hardship narratives as an example of 'cruciform news', that is, news which is shaped on every level by the cross of Christ. After a brief study of the likely response of the Corinthian church to this form of news I suggested in chapter five that Paul's commitment to this theological message shaped his determination to share his news in this way even though he could be fairly sure that his audience would receive his news negatively. This finding was reinforced by a discussion from the perspective of a hermeneutic of suspicion, in which the case was made for the priority Paul gives to his theological message over personal popularity.

As the study shifted its focus in Part B to the contribution of Paul to a critique of contemporary news handling, I concluded in chapter six that Paul's model of news handling as evidenced in the hardship narratives of the Corinthian correspondence could justifiably be described as cruciform, that is, determined on every level by the

cross of Christ, which served both as the locus for God's powerful and saving activity in the world and also as the pattern of authentic Christian discipleship. These texts suggest that Paul's communicative choices surrounding news – what stories to share as well as how he shared them – took place with the controlling paradigm of the crucified Messiah in whose path the Christian is called to walk. I went on to outline the empirical methodology which would be employed in the gathering of data about the examples of contemporary Christian news handling which would be the subject of the later Pauline critique. I made an argument for following a case study approach which would look at two examples of news handling from different angles in order to discover the key issues which arose in its production, text and reception. I described the way in which Paul's first-century example would be used as a theological framework in which the main issues which emerged from the case studies would be placed.

In chapter seven I introduced the first of the two case-studies, the handling by the Church of England of its annual church attendance statistics. I outlined the historical reasons which make this case study relevant and through an analysis of its production, text and reception concluded that two of the key dynamics in the news handling process were the minimising of the sense of 'bad news' in the story and protecting the reputation of the national church as an important organisation of enduring public value. When in chapter eight I considered these two issues in more detail and placed them in the Pauline cruciform paradigm, two conclusions were made. First, while a concern for protecting reputation is a major part of contemporary news handling, Paul brings a critical perspective to this question: his own apostolic reputation is important to him for a number of reasons, and yet fundamentally this reputation is informed by his own focus on the cross as the mark of authentic Christian discipleship. It is out of a concern to be known as a follower of the crucified Christ that Paul shares the stories of his own hardships, and this raises questions about the sort of reputation Christians should seek for themselves. Second, Paul shares little of the fear of bad news that is present in contemporary

news handling. He was fully aware that certain aspects of his news would be entirely unwelcome to his audience, but so was the message of Christ and him crucified to successful Corinth (1 Cor 1:18-25). His theology of the cross leads to a reassessment of whether certain stories are really that bad after all.

The second case study comprised an assessment of *Alpha News*. In chapter nine I argued for the significance of the Alpha phenomenon within the Christian culture of the UK and thus the potential influence of such a widely distributed newspaper as *Alpha News*. As an example of news handling I demonstrated through production and textual analysis that it was dominated by two main themes: the desire to share good news and also thereby encourage the readership. In the reception analysis, however, I discovered an interesting response from a number of readers who looked favourably on the Alpha course but who had a broadly negative response to *Alpha News*, finding it far from encouraging. In the Pauline critique which followed in chapter ten I showed how the emphasis on good news stemmed from a particular understanding of God's activity in the world through the language of the 'kingdom of God', coupled with a belief in a strong connection between bad news and the work of the devil. A critique based on Paul's cruciform news highlights the theological shortcomings of this approach: Paul shares news about suffering precisely because he wishes to emphasise the eschatological tension between the 'already' and the 'not yet', the presence of God in tough times and the nature of suffering as a hallmark of faithful Christian living. In terms of encouragement, Paul's model of news, rooted in the cross of Christ, assumes that stories of suffering can actually be more encouraging than stories of success, because such stories echo the pattern of the gospel itself. I concluded by indicating how this case study raises a number of questions about what stories Christians seek to share in their news handling and how they seek to encourage others through their news.

Findings: Implications and Significance

The interdisciplinary nature of this study means that it is possible to make a number of conclusions at the end of the argument summarised above. For the purposes of clarity I will return to the opening task I set myself in this study and reflect on three key areas: the contribution made by the apostle Paul to thinking on contemporary communication, the theological nature of news handling and the cross as a model for handling news.

The Apostle Paul and Contemporary Communication

An important part of the rationale for this study was that Paul had previously been undervalued as a resource for theological thinking on contemporary communication. Studies on his communicative models and methods abound, but within thinking on contemporary Christian communication, with the possible exception of preaching, Paul is largely absent.[1] This examination of Paul's news handling in Corinth and its contemporary application suggests, however, that Paul has a distinct contribution to make to theological reflection in this area for at least three reasons.

First, there is significant correlation between the communicative context in which Paul was operating in Corinth and that experienced by Christians engaged in handling news today. The cultural similarities between first-century Corinth and twenty-first century Britain have already been highlighted by Anthony Thiselton in

---

[1] This not to suggest that there has been no link between Paul and contemporary communication thinking, but simply that it all operates in one direction, from the present day to Paul. Thus a number of scholars have shown how present-day models of thought on communication can be used to analyse Paul's letters (see a discussion of speech-act theory in Thiselton, *1 Corinthians*, 51-53 and an application of 'new rhetoric' in rhetorical criticism in Chaim Perelman and Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca, *The New Rhetoric: a Treatise on Argumentation*, trans. John Wilkinson and Purcell Weaver (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1969)). However, few scholars have asked how Paul's communication might influence that of today. An exception is Paul's approach to preaching which is seen as relevant for preachers today. See D.A. Carson, *The Cross and Christian Ministry: An Exposition of Passages from 1 Corinthians* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1993).

his recent commentary, but this study drew together work from other scholars to suggest that the communicative context in Corinth bears two striking parallels with that of today. First, I showed how Paul, both in Corinth and throughout his ministry, was operating in an environment where news was both available and highly valued. Just as Paul shared news through his letters, so he also received it from the early Christian communities who were keen to stay in touch with one another. Second, I suggested that there is some correlation between the culture surrounding the sophistic teachers in Corinth and that of contemporary Britain, as summed up in the phenomenon of 'spin'. Paul was speaking in an environment where some speakers' chief aims were to please the audience, create and protect their own reputation, prioritise presentation over content and pay little regard to truth-telling; in today's era of news management and spin doctors Paul might recognise many of these tendencies in the prevailing models of communication. None of this is to underestimate the gap between Paul's world and ours; it is, however, to maintain that even though the world in which Paul was communicating was not one of television and print media some of the issues he faced were still similar to those faced by communicators today.

Second, in the light of this challenging context Paul demonstrates careful theological reflection on the message and form of his own sharing of news. Thiselton, Schrage, Winter and others have argued that, notwithstanding the insights garnered through rhetorical criticism on how Paul structured his letters, the fact should not be lost that Paul's primary concern in communication is theological; his choices as a speaker and letter writer were shaped by his overall commitment to his theological message. This study has concluded that this general principle is true of his approach to handling news as seen in the selected texts from the Corinthian letters. I have demonstrated that the hardship narratives, instead of being simply rhetorical *excursi* designed to impress the Corinthian church, are in fact both in form and content consistent with Paul's overall model of cruciform communication. Paul's sharing of news is carefully thought through and is an expression of the heart of Paul's

theological message, namely the cross of Christ; even the rhetorical devices which Paul does employ do not detract from this overarching theological focus. Thus from the evidence of Paul's news handling in Corinth it is possible to suggest that, as a communicator who clearly reflected theologically on his past behaviour and carried through this reflection into current practice, Paul has an important contribution to make to the more general sphere of communication theology today.

Third, Paul's model of communication can provide a relevant and sharp critique of the complex contemporary practice of handling news. The two case studies in Part B of this study demonstrated that because the apostle Paul takes a theological approach to communication it is possible to use his writings to construct a theological framework against which contemporary news handling can be assessed; this was the hope at the outset of this study, and the case studies have shown this hope to be realised. By critiquing the two examples of news handling through the lens of Paul's model of cruciform news, it was possible to gain significant insights into the choices which had been made by contemporary communicators concerning the nature of good and bad news, the creation and protection of reputation, and the nature of encouragement; more will be concluded about these specific insights in due course, but the value of Paul as a conversation partner is clear. In other words, not only have I shown that Paul *might* have a contribution to make to a theological critique of contemporary news handling (because of the similarities in context between his world and ours, and also the theological model he uses to share his own news), but also that he *does* have a contribution to make, because of the way he enabled a theological analysis of the two case-studies chosen for this study to be made.

Certain implications follow from these findings. First, greater attention could be given to the similarities between the communicative context of Paul and today's communicators; the differences are clearly to be seen, but the technological gap should not obscure the possibility for deeper parallels between his world and ours.

Second, this study reinforces the conclusion of Thiselton, Schrage and Winter that, for all the insights gained through rhetorical criticism and those adopting a hermeneutic of suspicion, it should be remembered that Paul writes first and foremost as a theologian. If Paul's rhetorical choices in his sharing of news were determined by his theological agenda, it remains likely that his choices in other areas were as well. Third, and most significantly, this study has opened up the possibility that Paul has a contribution to make to theological thinking on communication that is greater than has hitherto been appreciated by scholars in this field. At the moment it seems that engagement with Paul is firmly restricted to the field of New Testament studies, but this interdisciplinary study has shown that his potential relevance to questions of contemporary theology is considerable. As a theologian and communicator, the apostle Paul has much to contribute to contemporary thinking on the challenges of communication in a complex world.

News Handling as a Theological Task

As well as leading us to the conclusion that Paul has a distinct contribution to make in an understanding of contemporary news handling, this study has also underlined the theological issues involved in the news handling process. It was my assertion at the beginning of this thesis that it is in the process of handling news that the interesting theological questions are to be asked, and this view has been validated by the two case-studies undertaken. It has been demonstrated that for the Christian communicator there is much more to handling news than simply writing a good press release, or preparing a well written story; as I undertook qualitative analysis of the news handling process of both the Church of England and one of its most prominent churches, Holy Trinity Brompton, I discovered that, in these two examples at least, sharing news raises questions of reputation, the nature and impact of bad and good news, and the relationship between news and

encouragement. Through using a Pauline framework[2] I demonstrated how these issues are theological in nature and are concerned with identifying how the Christian church wishes to be known, what space there is for a theology of weakness, an understanding of the work of the devil in the world, and the ongoing nature of the Christian life. To handle the two news stories under particular discussion is thus to engage with these theological issues (and no doubt others as well), even if, as in the case of these two stories, those handling the stories were not totally aware of all these deeper questions.

All this is not to suggest, of course, that these theological issues are the only ones raised by Christians handling news. While I do argue that these case-studies have a relevance beyond the actual limits of the news story under particular focus, I would not claim that a survey of other examples of news handling would not discover other issues of theological significance. However, as I explained at the outset of this study, a survey of the broad sphere of news handling was not one of my aims. The point that this study has sought to demonstrate is that news handling is generally a theological task, a form of communication which involves a number of theological assumptions about, for example, the church, the world and the nature of Christian living. In making this point, this study has implications for two spheres of research already mentioned. First, it poses a challenge to that body of thinking which understands the task for the Christian handling news as primarily a practical one. We have seen that there are key theological decisions to be made as a particular news story is handled, and not just practical decisions about producing the material that is to be published. Second, this study highlights that, within the research sphere of religious news, the role undertaken by the person handling news on behalf of a Christian organisation is an important one to study. Hitherto focus has centred on the journalists who report the religious news and the audience who

---

[2] Note not *the* Pauline framework. Other frameworks may be discovered through the analysis of other texts.

receives it; this study suggests there is an important part of this communicative process that remains to be fully explored.

The Cross of Christ and Handling News

Yet it is in the third and final key finding of this study, namely the place of the cross in contemporary news handling, that the significance of the preceding two areas can be seen more fully. The aim of this study was to examine how Paul's communicative theory and practice, as evidenced in selected texts from the Corinthian correspondence, might inform a much-needed theological critique of contemporary Christian news handling, even if it was not clear at the outset the form that this critique would take. While the two sections above conclude a) that Paul is in a position to offer much to such a critique and b) that a theological perspective on news handling is indeed overdue, it is in the discovery of the cross as a theological paradigm for handling news that these two initial findings come together to produce a coherent and sustained theological challenge and with it a validation for the two main theses of this study.

Part A of this study ended with the conclusion that the news Paul found himself handling most, the news of his hardship, could be described as cruciform, that is, determined in both form and content by the cross of Christ. It was important to be clear that for Paul the cross is not only that one-off event through which the saving purposes of God were achieved, but also the hallmark of living for the faithful follower of Jesus. As 1 Corinthians 2:1-5 makes clear, to preach the crucified Christ means living a cruciform life. This leads Paul to share news which in turn reflects this aspect of his discipleship: his own weakness as the locus for God's power to be seen, as witnessed to in the crucifixion; his own suffering as a sign of walking the way of the cross; his own disregard for human praise and honour as the working out of the value system of the cross; and his own ongoing and yet hopeful struggle as he waits for the certain victory of the cross to be consummated. Such a model of news was counter-cultural; it ran against the patterns of communication popular in

secular Corinth and even those desired by the Christian church in that city. And yet Paul's commitment to the cross as the dominant factor in his communicative choices determined that he continued to share such news even when he knew it would be far from appreciated.

In using this cruciform model of news in Part B as the critical lens through which to view contemporary news handling, it became clear that the cross continues to provide as sharp a challenge to today's prevailing patterns of news handling as it did in its first Corinthian context. Although there was only space to examine two case-studies in detail it is possible to identify four ways in which a theological framework of the cross might inform a Christian understanding of news handling.

First, a cruciform approach to news handling might involve a review of what constitutes bad news. One of the definitions of bad news is news which is unwelcome either to the audience or the organisation (or both). In a sense both case-studies exhibited a wariness of news which was perceived to have a negative impact on the audience: the Church of England team handling statistical news believed that news of declining attendance would be received negatively by church members and the secular press, and seemed thus almost fearful of bad news, while the *Alpha News* team believed that certain stories would not be welcomed by their readership and thus needed to be avoided. Reflecting on Paul's model of cruciform news it was possible to see how the cross helped Paul to a different understanding of bad news; in 1 Corinthians 1:18-25 he recognises that the cross was unwelcome to both Jew and Gentile, and yet this does not alter the fact that it is still good news. The gospel of Christ and him crucified was not a message that people wanted to hear but that did not make it bad news; similarly, even though the news of his own suffering was unwelcome in successful Corinth, it did not make it bad news which needed to be avoided. Thus, even on a basic level, Paul's example suggests whatever bad news means, it cannot be determined simply by whether it produces a negative response

from an audience. Even if it does, our study of Paul in Corinth suggests, it may still be good news.

Second, and developing the point made above, a focus on the cross might entail a different understanding of what news is appropriate for Christians to share. The Christians handling news in both case studies exhibited in their own way a desire to share positive news stories about the organisation which they are representing. While for the Church House team the priority seemed to be protecting the reputation of the church (see below), for the communicators at HTB this inclination was based on a belief that to share stories that were not positive (that is, not about success, growth and conversions) would be to give publicity to the work of the devil in the world. Rooted in a particular understanding of the nature of God's activity in the world and the large sphere of satan's influence, the team behind *Alpha News* chose positive stories which they believed reflected God's activity in the world rather than the devil's. Paul's cruciform model of news takes a fundamentally different path; even though he could have shared stories of success, Paul deliberately shares stories of his own suffering. He does so confident that it is God (and not the devil) who has been at work at such times in his life, precisely because it is this pattern of God's power being seen in human weakness that he identifies in the cross and which he believes is also a characteristic of faithful Christian living. To share stories of personal suffering is to embody the gospel of Christ and him crucified. Thus the challenge from our study of cruciform news is that it is not inappropriate to share stories about hardship or suffering; indeed, as we will see below, it can be helpful to do so.[3]

---

[3] This is not to suggest that positive news should not be shared, merely that bad news need not necessarily be suppressed. Elsewhere in the Corinthian correspondence Paul shares encouraging news about the generosity of the Macedonian church (2 Cor 8:1-7), so it is clearly not the case that he only shares news about suffering. Nevertheless the challenge from our reading of the hardship narratives still stands.

Third, an emphasis on the cross in handling news might result in a renewed understanding of the relationship between news and encouragement, based on an appreciation of the place of weakness and suffering in the Christian life. In both case studies there was a recognition that news has the capacity to encourage. The Church House team wanted to avoid a negative message and highlight the positive so that people in the pews would be encouraged about the present role and future impact of the church; in *Alpha News* encouragement was one of the key aims of the newspaper. Indeed, at HTB there was a strong belief in the close link between good news and encouragement; the more good news people receive, the more encouraged they will be. Not only was this assumption brought into serious question by some of the focus group members, it also ran contrary to how Paul viewed the relationship between news and encouragement. According to the data examined in this study Paul believed that news about his own hardship could be encouraging because it affirmed to others that an authentic Christian who is walking the way of the cross will share in the 'sufferings of Christ' (2 Cor 1:5); hardship in the Christian journey is thus not an example of failure but genuine discipleship. It is true that Paul always maintains a hopeful perspective to this suffering; in terms of the future the suffering will one day come to an end, and in terms of the present, it is in enduring hardship where God's life-giving power and gracious presence can be experienced. Nevertheless, Paul expects that by sharing news of his own suffering faithful believers will be encouraged. With respect to contemporary news handling Paul's example suggests that if people want to encourage others they should share news which includes hardship and perseverance, because in so doing they are reflecting the pattern of Christian living shaped by the cross.

Finally, cruciform news might lead to a reconsideration of the reputation of the church as an organisation of success and thus a review of the prevailing news values. In both examples of news handling examined for this study reputation was a key concern: the Church of England representatives were keen to protect a

reputation of the Church as an important part of national life; *Alpha News* wanted to protect the brand of Alpha as a course which was successful and growing in effectiveness throughout the world. The cruciform model of news identified in the Pauline texts involves a different approach. While Paul is concerned for his reputation for authenticity and trustworthiness, the fact that he shares news about his own hardship with a church where success and honour were so valued indicates that a key part of his reputation is that of a herald of the crucified Christ. He volunteers stories which testify to his public humiliation as an apostle and follower of Jesus, and yet does so because it is in this conformity to the ridiculed and crucified Christ that the validation of his apostolic identity is to be found. Such an example raises questions about whether the church is happier being identified with the crucified Jesus or the resurrected Christ; the evidence from the two case studies suggests that the image of success being sought in this news sharing draws more on the visible victory of the resurrection.[4] The model of cruciform news derived from Paul makes us ask how a church which sought to align its identity with the crucified Christ might share very different stories, or perhaps handle the existing stories in a very different way.

None of the above findings is more than an indication of how a cruciform model of news drawn from the apostle Paul might affect contemporary news handling within the church and Christian organisations. They are offered as a provisional assessment of how the apostle Paul's communication in Corinth might be interpreted and applied today, but, as the section below on further study testifies, there is much work that remains to be done. Moreover, I am aware that in suggesting the cross as a critical framework for Christian communication, I am straying into a large area of debate on the role of the cross in contemporary

---

[4] Cousar, *Theology of the Cross*, 3-4. Of course, some scholars have suggested a *via media*, namely doing theology from the perspective of Holy Saturday. See Alan E. Lewis, *Between Cross and Resurrection: A Theology of Holy Saturday* (Grand Rapids, Mi: W.B. Eerdmans, 2001); see also Young and Ford, *Meaning and Truth*, 223 who make this point from a close reading of certain Corinthian texts.

Christian theology. Both before but especially after Moltmann's *The Crucified God* German scholars in particular have recognised how an emphasis on the cross as not only the basis for salvation but also the foundation for the identity and character of the church can fundamentally affect the way theology is done.[5] I can only suggest that this study has in a small way added another voice to this larger debate and perhaps shown an additional area in which the cross might have relevance in contemporary theological thinking and Christian living.

Further Study

In drawing the conclusions to this study it has become clear that further research in all three areas detailed above would bring considerable reward. In terms of Paul and his contribution to contemporary theology, several research paths suggest themselves. It would certainly be interesting to expand the focus from just the Corinthian hardship narratives to other texts in his corpus and consider whether the concept of cruciform news identified in the Corinthian passages might be found elsewhere, or whether different models of handling news emerged.[6] In particular, it would be interesting to examine 2 Corinthian 8-9 as a model of using news for spiritual encouragement, Galatians 1:12-2:14 as a model for dealing with controversial news, and 2 Corinthians 1:12-2:4 as a model for coping with accusations of a lack of integrity. Developing this pattern it would also be instructive to discover whether Paul's approach to news as outlined in this study is consistent with that displayed by other New Testament writers. More generally, it might be that the use in this study of the apostle Paul as a resource for theological thinking on a contemporary issue could open up the possibility for him to be drawn on in other fields where he has hitherto been largely ignored. Certainly in terms of

---

[5] Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology*, trans. R.A. Wilson and John Bowden (London: SCM Press, 1974). See discussion of contributions made by Gerhard Delling, Ulrich Luz, Wolfgang Schrage, Peter Stuhlmacher and especially Ernst Käsemann in Cousar, *Theology of the Cross*, 5-18.

[6] If it is not that does not invalidate our findings here but if it were it would add greater strength to them.

contemporary communication theology this study has suggested a paradigm which might be employed in other areas as well, such as the nature of truth-telling in communication today or the use of technology in church media presentation.[7]

There is also a need for further study to be undertaken into the whole sphere of news handling undertaken by Christians. The two examples examined in this study illustrate the fact that there are theological issues involved in handling news, and yet a study which encompassed more examples of handling news would be helpful in assessing the key themes which emerge. Moreover, it would be helpful to integrate some of the findings of this study into the research field of religious news, perhaps in analysing how a news story about the church is handled by that church's representative before it is reported by the journalists and received by the audience.

Finally, the model of cruciform news as a theological framework for a critique of contemporary news handling would benefit from further work. Not only might each of the areas identified above be explored in more detail – the cross and unwelcome news, the cross and the kingdom of God, the cross and reputation, and the cross and encouragement each deserve fuller reflection than I have been able to give them here – but also it would be important to discuss how such an emphasis on the cross as discerned in Paul's hardship narratives might need to be balanced by a focus on the resurrection. I have not had the space in this study to do justice to these two great themes in Paul's theology, instead focusing almost exclusively on the cross which was so central to Paul's own expression of communicative behaviour in 1 Corinthians 2:1-5. I recognise that there is something artificial in dividing the cross from the resurrection, let alone from the life of Jesus; yet while for the purposes of this study this narrow focus has been appropriate, it is undoubtedly

---

[7] For example, one question on which 1 Corinthians 2:1-5 might shed some light is the extent to which the form of preaching needs to cohere with the message being preached. That is to say, is it possible to preach Christ and him crucified with a slick PowerPoint presentation? The suggestion is that on this question Paul would at the very least be a valuable theological resource with whom to engage.

the case that a future study into the role of the resurrection in Paul's news might correct this imbalance.[8]

Conclusion

This study has sought to show how the communicative behaviour and values of the apostle Paul in first-century Corinth might be helpful as a theological resource for the critique of a practice which is more theological in nature than has hitherto been recognised. It is my conclusion that the model of news which Paul employs most consistently in this correspondence – that of cruciform news – enables a significant and wide-ranging critique to be made of contemporary Christian news handling. In particular I suggest that in a communicative environment where signs of 'spin' are widely seen, a focus on the cross in sharing news, as practised by the apostle Paul, offers a stark challenge to those Christians who handle news. To adopt a pattern of cruciform news might involve the transformation of prevailing models of news handling but to do so would perhaps involve greater conformity to the cross of Christ, in whose shadow every Christian is called to walk.

---

[8] See, for example, Oliver O'Donovan, *Resurrection and Moral Order: An Outline for Evangelical Ethics*, 2nd ed. (Leicester: Apollos, 1994).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Allan, Stuart. *News Culture*. Buckingham: Open University Press, 1999.

Allo, E.B. *Saint Paul. Seconde Epître aux Corinthiens*. Paris: Librairie Lecoffre, 1937.

Alpha News. Issue 33, March-June 2004.

Arens, Edmund. *Christopraxis: A Theology of Action*. Translated by John F. Hoffmeyer. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995.

Attfield, David G. *Proclaiming the Gospel in a Secular Age: a General Theory of Religious Communication*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001.

Babin, Pierre, and Mercedes Iannone. *The New Era in Religious Communication*. Translated by David Smith. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991.

Badaracco, Claire Hoertz, ed. *Quoting God: How Media Shape Ideas about Religion and Culture*. Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 2005.

Barley, Lynda. *Christian Roots, Contemporary Spirituality* Time to Listen. London: Church House Publishing, 2006.

_____. *Churchgoing Today* Time to Listen. London: Church House Publishing, 2006.

Barnett, Paul. *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1997.

_____. "Paul, Apologist to the Corinthians." In *Paul and the Corinthians: Studies on a Community in Conflict: Essays in Honour of Margaret Thrall*, ed. Trevor Burke and J. Keith Elliott, Supplements to Novum Testamentum; vol. 109, 313-326. Leiden: Brill, 2003.

Barrett, C.K. *A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*. 2nd ed. London: Adam & Charles Black, 1971.

_____. *A Commentary on the Second Epistle to the Corinthians*. London: Adam & Charles Black, 1973.

Bates, Stephen. "Happy-clappy way to satisfy hunger for truth." *Guardian*, 24 April 2000, 9.

_____. "Why God Needs Good PR." *The Guardian*, 19 February 2001, Media Section 2-3.

Bell, Allan. *The Language of News Media*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1991.

Betz, H.D. *Galatians*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979.

Blair Apologises for Mishandling F1 Row. BBC News Online, 17 November 1997. Accessed 4 May 2006. Available from news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/31780.stm.

Bluck, John. *Christian Communication Reconsidered*. Geneva: WCC Publications, 1989.

Bockmuehl, Markus. "'Dotty' Christianity: Assessing Percy on Alpha." *Reviews in Religion and Theology*, no. 1 (1998): 10-12.

Boyd-Barrett, Oliver, and Terhi Rantanen. "The Globalization of News." In *The Globalization of News*, ed. Oliver Boyd-Barrett and Terhi Rantanen. London: SAGE, 1998.

Brian, Stephen. "The *Alpha* Course: An Analysis of its Claim to Offer an Educational Course on 'The Meaning of Life'." unpublished PhD thesis, University of Surrey, 2003.

_____. "Deconstructing the Alpha Testimonies." *Theology* 108, no. 843 (2005): 193-202.

Brierley, Peter. *'Christian' England: What the 1989 English Church Census Reveals*. London: MARC Europe, 1991.

_____. *The Tide Is Running Out. What the English Church Attendance Survey Reveals*. London: Christian Research, 2000.

_____. *Pulling Out of the Nosedive: A Contemporary Picture of Churchgoing: What the 2005 English Church Census Reveals*. London: Christian Research, 2006.

Bruce, Steve. *God is Dead: Secularization in the West*. Oxford: Blackwell, 2002.

Buch-Anderson, Thomas. *Denmark Row: The Power of Cartoons*. BBC News Website, 3 October 2006. Accessed 1 February 2008. Available from news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/5392786.stm.

Buddenbaum, Judith M. *Reporting News about Religion: an Introduction for Journalists*. Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1998.

Buddenbaum, Judith M., and Debra L. Mason (eds.). *Readings on Religion as News*. Ames: Iowa State University Press, 2000.

Bullmore, Michael A. *St. Paul's Theology of Rhetorical Style: an Examination of 1 Corinthians 2.1-5 in Light of First Century Greco-Roman Rhetorical Culture*. San Francisco: International Scholars, 1995.

Bultmann, Rudolf Karl. *Der Stil der paulinischen Predigt und die kynischstische Diatribe* Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1910.

Carson, D.A. *The Cross and Christian Ministry: An Exposition of Passages from 1 Corinthians*. Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1993.

Cartledge, Mark J. *Charismatic Glossolalia: An Empirical-Theological Study* Ashgate New Critical Thinking in Theology and Biblical Studies. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002.

Castelli, Elizabeth A. *Imitating Paul: A Discourse of Power*. Louisville, Ky: Westminster/John Knox, 1991.

Chen, Chiung Hwang. "'Molympics'? Journalistic Discourse of Mormons in Relation to the 2002 Winter Olympic Games." *Journal of Media and Religion* 2, no. 1 (2003).

Christians, Clifford G., and Michael Traber, eds. *Communication Ethics and Universal Values*. London: SAGE, 1997.

Church Statistics: Some Facts and Figures about the Church of England. London: Central Board of Finance of the Church of England, 1985-.

Clarke, Andrew D. *Secular and Christian Leadership in Corinth: A Socio-Historical and Exegetical Study of 1 Corinthians 1-6* Arbeiten zur Geschichte des antiken Judentums and des Urchristentums; Bd. 18. Leiden: Brill, 1993.

Coates, David. "The Character of New Labour." In *New Labour in Power*, ed. David Coates and Peter Lawler. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000.

Combe, Victoria. "Anglican Churchgoers Fall Below One Million." *Daily Telegraph*, 13 November 1999, 2.

_____. "Church's course feeds a spiritual hunger." *Daily Telegraph*, 26 December 2001, 8.

Cooney, John. *No News is Bad News: Communications Policy in the Catholic Church*. Dublin: Veritas, 1974.

Cousar, Charles B. *A Theology of the Cross: The Death of Jesus in the Pauline Letters*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990.

Davie, Grace. *Religion in Britain since 1945: Believing without Belonging*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1994.

Daymon, Christine, and Immy Holloway. *Qualitative Research Methods in Public Relations and Marketing Communications*. London: Routledge, 2002.

Dow, Graham. *The Importance of Family Meals*. October 2003. Accessed 8 February 2008. Available from www.carlislediocese.org.uk/news/31/346.html.

Dunn, James D.G. *Jesus and the Spirit: A Study of the Religious and Charismatic Experience of Jesus and the First Christians as Reflected in the New Testament*. London: SCM Press, 1975.

_____. *Romans 1-8*. Vol. 38a Word Biblical Commentary. Dallas, Texas: Word Books, 1988.

_____. *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*. Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998.

Ellul, Jacques. *Propaganda: the Formation of Men's Attitudes*. Translated by Konrad Keller and Jean Lerner. New York: Vintage, 1973.

_____. *The Humiliation of the Word*. Translated by Joyce Main Hanks. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1985.

_____. *The Technological Bluff*. Translated by Geoffrey W. Bromiley. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1990.

_____. *Sources and Trajectories: Eight Early Articles that Set the Stage*. Translated by Marva J. Dawn. Grand Rapids, Mich: W.B. Eerdmans, 1997.

Elsdon-Dew, Mark, ed. *The God Who Changes Lives: Remarkable Stories of God at Work Today*. Vol. 2. London: Alpha Publications, 1998.

Elseewi, Tarik Ahmed. "The Danish Cartoon Controversy: Globalized Spaces and Universalizing Impulses." *Global Media Journal* 6, no. 11 (2007).

Emmanuel, Dominic. *Challenges of Christian Communication: Monologue or Dialogue?* Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999.

Epp, Eldon Jay. "New Testament Papyrus Manuscripts and Letter Carrying in Greco-Roman Times." In *The Future of Early Christianity: essays in honor of Helmut Koester*, ed. Birger A. Pearson. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991.

Everts, J.M. "Conversion and Call of Paul." In *Dictionary of Paul and his Letters*, ed. Gerald F. Hawthorne and Ralph P. Martin. Leicester: IVP, 1993.

Fee, Gordon D. *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* The New International Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1987.

_____. *Paul's Letter to the Philippians* The New International Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1995.

Ferrari, Markus Schiefer. *Die Sprache des Leids in den paulinischen Peristasenkatalogen* Stuttgarter Biblischer Beiträge 23. Stuttgart: Verlag Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1991.

Finney, John. *Finding Faith Today: How Does It Happen?* Swindon: British and Foreign Bible Society, 1992.

Fitzgerald, John T. *Cracks in an Earthen Vessel: An Examination of the Catalogues of Hardships in the Corinthian Correspondence* Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series. Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1988.

Forbes, Christopher. "Comparison, Self-Praise and Irony: Paul's Boasting and Conventions of Hellenistic Rhetoric." *New Testament Studies* 32 (1986): 1-30.

Fowler, Roger. *Language in the News: Discourse and Ideology in the Press*. London: Routledge, 1991.

Gamble, Harry Y. *Books and Readers in the Early Church: A History of Early Christian Texts*. New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 1995.

Gans, Herbert J. "Deciding What's News." In *News: A Reader*, ed. Howard Tumber. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999.

Genasi, Chris. *Winning Reputations: How To Be Your Own Spin Doctor*. Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002.

Georgi, Dieter. *Remembering the Poor: The History of Paul's Collection for Jerusalem*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1992.

Gill, Robin. *Churchgoing and Christian Ethics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.

_____. *The 'Empty' Church Revisited* Explorations in Practical, Pastoral and Empirical Theology. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003.

Gledhill, Ruth. "Empty Pews Force Church Recount." *The Times*, 13 November 1999, 13.

_____. "The Endless Trail for a Story that Never Appears." *Church of England Newspaper*, February 2001.

Goddard, Andrew. "Jacques Ellul and the Power of the Media." *Studies in Christian Ethics* 13, no. 1 (2000): 66-75.

Gumbel, Nicky. *Questions of Life*. Eastbourne: Kingsway, 1993.

Habermas, Jürgen. *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*. Translated by Thomas Burger and with the assistance of Fredrick Lawrence. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1989.

Hafemann, Scott J. "A Call to Pastoral Suffering: The Need for Recovering Paul's Model of Ministry in 2 Corinthians." *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 4, no. 2 (2000): 22-36.

Hagen, Ingunn, and Janet Wasko, eds. *Consuming Audiences? Production and Reception in Media Research*. Cresskill, N.J.: Hampton Press, 2000.

Hall, David R. *The Unity of the Corinthian Correspondence* Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series; 251. London: T&T Clark International, 2003.

Hand, Chris. *Falling short? The Alpha Course Examined*. Epsom: Day One, 1998.

Hargreaves, Ian. *Journalism: Truth or Dare?* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003.

Hattersley, Roy. "We Just Don't Know What to Believe." *The Guardian*, 19 June 2000.

Hauerwas, Stanley. *After Christendom? How the Church Is to Behave If Freedom, Justice and a Christian Nation Are Bad Ideas*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1991.

Hauerwas, Stanley, with Richard Bondi, and David B. Burrell. *Truthfulness and Tragedy: Further Investigations into Christian Ethics*. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1977.

Hays, Richard B. "The Conversion of the Imagination: Scripture and Eschatology in 1 Corinthians." *New Testament Studies* 45 (1999): 391-412.

Haywood, Roger. *Manage Your Reputation: How to Plan Public Relations to Build and Protect the Organization's Most Powerful Asset*. London: Kogan Page, 2002.

Hefferman, Richard. "Media Management: Labour's Political Communications Strategy." In *The Impact of New Labour*, ed. Gerald R. Taylor, 50-67. Basingstoke: Macmillian, 1999.

Hodgson, Robert. "Paul the Apostle and First Century Tribulation Lists." *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche*, no. 74 (1983): 59-80.

Hollingsworth, Mark. *Tim Bell: The Ultimate Spin Doctor*. London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1997.

Hoover, Stewart M. "Mass Media and Religious Pluralism." In *The Democratization of Communication*, ed. Philip Lee. Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1995.

_____. *Religion in the News: Faith and Journalism in American Public Discourse*. Thousand Oaks, Calif.: SAGE, 1998.

Hunt, Stephen. "'Doing the Stuff': The Vineyard Connection." In *Charismatic Christianity: Sociological Perspectives*, ed. Stephen Hunt, Malcolm Hamilton and Tony Walter. Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1997.

_____. *Anyone for Alpha? Evangelism in a Post-Christian Society*: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2001.

_____. *The Alpha Enterprise: Evangelism in a Post-Christian Era*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004.

Hurtado, Larry W. "The Jerusalem Collection and the Book of Galatians." *Journal for the Study of the New Testament*, no. 5 (1979): 46-62.

Jackson, Bob. *Hope for the Church: Contemporary Strategies for Growth* Explorations. London: Church House Publishing, 2002.

_____. *The Road to Growth: Towards a Thriving Church*. London: Church House Publishing, 2005.

Jenkins, Philip. *Pedophiles and Priests: Anatomy of a Contemporary Crisis*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996.

Jensen, Klaus. *Making Sense of the News: Towards a Theory and an Empirical Model of Reception for the Study of Mass Communication*. Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 1986.

Jensen, Klaus Bruhn, and Nicholas W. Jankowski, eds. *A Handbook of Qualitative Methodologies For Mass Communication Research*. London: Routledge, 1991.

Jervell, Jacob. "Der schwache Charismatiker." In *Rechtfertigung: Festschrift für Ernst Käsemann zum 70. Geburtstag*, ed. Wolfgang Pöhlmann Johannes Friedrich, and Peter Stuhlmacher. Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1976.

Johnson, Joy, and Lynda Dyson. *News Management: The Anatomy of Spin*. London: Routledge, 2003.

Johnston, Carla B. *Global News Access: the Impact of New Communication Technologies*. Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 1998.

Jones, Nicholas. *Campaign 1997: How the General Election was Won and Lost*. London: Indigo, 1997.

Jones, Peter. "Augustus: Master of Spin." In *Running the Empire*: BBC Radio 3, 8 October 1999.

Jowett, Garth, and Victoria O'Donnell. *Propaganda and Persuasion*. 3rd ed. London: Sage Publications, 1999.

Judge, E.A. *Rank and Status in the World of the Caesars and St. Paul*. Christ Church: University of Canterbury, 1982.

Kavanagh, Dennis, and David Butler. *The British General Election of 2005*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005.

Kennedy, George A. *Classical Rhetoric and Its Christian and Secular Tradition from Ancient to Modern Times*. Chapel Hill, NC.: University of North Carolina Press, 1980.

_____. *New Testament Interpretation through Rhetorical Criticism*. Chapel Hill, NC.: University of North Carolina Press, 1984.

Kennedy, Maev. "God gets glitzy as Christians hit silver screen." *Guardian*, 10 September 2005, 5.

Klein, Rudolf. *The New Politics of the National Health Service*. 4th ed. Harlow: Prentice Hall, 2001.

Kraft, Charles H. *Communicating Jesus' Way*. Pasadena, Calif.: William Carey Library, 1999.

Krueger, Richard A., and Mary Anne Casey. *Focus groups: A Practical Guide for Applied Research*. 3rd ed. London: SAGE, 2000.

Latest Figures Show Churches Alive in the Community. Church of England Website, 8 December 2003. Accessed 19 March 2007. Available from www.cofe.anglican.org/news/latest_figures_show_churches_alive_in_the_community.html.

Lee, Philip. *The World Association for Christian Communication 1975-2000: A Labour of Love*. London: WACC, 2000.

Lewis, Alan E. *Between Cross and Resurrection: A Theology of Holy Saturday*. Grand Rapids, Mi: W.B. Eerdmans, 2001.

Lim, Timothy. "Not in Persuasive Words of Wisdom, but in the Demonstration of the Spirit and Power." *Novum Testamentum* 29, no. 2 (1987): 137-149.

Litfin, Duane. *St. Paul's Theology of Proclamation: 1 Corinthians 1-4 and Greco-Roman Rhetoric* Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series 79. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994.

Longenecker, Richard N. *Galatians*. Vol. 41 Word Biblical Commentary. Dallas, Texas: Word Books, 1990.

Lord, Andrew. *Spirit, Kingdom and Mission: A Charismatic Missiology* Grove Renewal Series. Cambridge: Grove Books, 2002.

Lule, Jack. *Daily News, Eternal Stories: the Mythological Role of Journalism*. New York: Guildford Press, 1991.

Luter Jr., A.B. "Gospel." In *Dictionary of Paul and his Letters*, ed. Gerald F. Hawthorne and Ralph P. Martin. Leicester: IVP, 1993.

Lyons, George. *Pauline Autobiography: Toward a New Understanding* Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series. Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1985.

Maltese, John Anthony. *Spin Control: the White House Office of Communications and the Management of Presidential News*. 2nd, rev. ed. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994.

Mann, Nyta. *Moore's the worry*. BBC News Online, 15 February 2002. Accessed 11 November 2003. Available from news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk_politics/1823369.stm.

Manning, Paul. *Spinning for Labour: Trade Unions and the New Media Environment*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 1998.

Martin, Dale B. *The Corinthian Body*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1995.

Martin, David. *A Sociology of English Religion*. London: SCM, 1967.

Martin, Ralph P. 2 *Corinthians*. Vol. 40 Word Biblical Commentary. Waco, Texas: Word Books, 1986.

Mayer, Martin. *Making News*. Harvard, Mass.: Harvard Business School Press, 1993.

McCune, Cynthia A. "Framing Reality: Shaping the News Coverage of the 1996 Tennessee Debate of Teaching Evolution." *Journal of Media and Religion* 2, no. 1 (2003).

McDonald, Elizabeth. *Alpha: New Life or New Lifestyle? A Biblical Assessment of the Alpha Course*. Cambridge: St Matthew Publications, 1996.

McDonnell, Jim. "Desperately Seeking Credibility: English Catholics, the News Media and the Church." In *Mediating Religion: Conversations in Media, Religion and Culture*, ed. Jolyon P. Mitchell and Sophia Marriage. London: T&T Clark, 2003.

McIlory. *Style or Substance: Does the Reputation of the Church Matter?* Cambridge papers towards a biblical mind; vol. 13, no.1. Cambridge: Jubilee Centre, 2004.

McNair, Brian. *News and Journalism in the UK: a Textbook*. 3rd ed. London: Routledge, 1999.

McQuail, Dennis. *Audience Analysis*. London: SAGE, 1998.

Midgley, Carol. "Spirited away: why the end is nigh for religion." *The Times*, 4 November 2004, 4-5.

Miller, David, Jenny Kitzinger, Kevin Williams, and Peter Beharrell. *The Circuit of Mass Communication: Media Strategies, Representation and Audience Reception in the AIDS Crisis* Glasgow Media Group. London: SAGE, 1998.

Mitchell, Jolyon P. *Visually Speaking: Radio and the Renaissance of Preaching*. Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999.

Mitchell, M.M. *Paul and the Rhetoric of Reconciliation: An Exegetical Investigation of the Language and Composition of 1 Corinthians* Hermeneutische Untersuchungen zur Theologie; 28. Tübingen: Mohr, 1991.

Mitchell, Stephen. *A History of News*. Fort Worth: Harcourt Brace, 1997.

Moltmann, Jürgen. *The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology*. Translated by R.A. Wilson and John Bowden. London: SCM Press, 1974.

Murphy-O'Connor, Jerome. *The Theology of the Second Letter to the Corinthians* New Testament Theology. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991.

Murray, Stuart. *Church after Christendom*. Carlisle: Paternoster, 2004.

_____. *Post-Christendom*. Carlisle: Paternoster, 2004.

New Research Shows 42% Say that Churches Should Be Funded by the State. Church of England Website, 20 April 2004. Accessed 19 March 2007. Available from www.cofe.anglican.org/news/news_item.2004-10-19.9713913526.

O'Donovan, Oliver. *Resurrection and Moral Order: An Outline for Evangelical Ethics*. 2nd ed. Leicester: Apollos, 1994.

O'Mahony, Kieran J. *Pauline Persuasion: A Sounding in 2 Corinthians 8-9* Journal for the Study of the New Testament supplement series 199. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000.

Oropeza, B.J. *Paul and Apostasy: Eschatology, Perseverance and Falling Away in the Corinthian Congregation* Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 2. Reihe 115. Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 2000.

Oster, Richard E. "Numismatic Windows in the Social World of Early Christianity: a Methodological Enquiry." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 101 (1982): 195-223.

Percy, Martyn. *Words, Wonders and Power: Understanding Contemporary Christian Fundamentalism and Revivalism*. London: SPCK, 1996.

_____. *Is There a Modern Charismatic Theology?* Oxford: Farmington Institute for Christian Studies, 1997.

_____. "'Join-the-dots' Christianity: Assessing ALPHA." *Reviews in Religion and Theology*, no. 3 (1997): 14-18.

_____, ed. *Previous Convictions*. London: SPCK, 2000.

Perelman, Chaim, and Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca. *The New Rhetoric: a Treatise on Argumentation.* Translated by John Wilkinson and Purcell Weaver. Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1969.

Peterson, Brian K. *Eloquence and the Proclamation of the Gospel in Corinth* Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series 163. Atlanta, Ga.: Scholars Press, 1998.

Petre, Jonathan. "Church Congregations Fall 100,000 in Two Years." *Daily Telegraph,* 13 January 2004, 8.

Plank, Karl A. *Paul and the Irony of Affliction* The Society of Biblical Literature Semeia Series. Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1987.

Plyming, Philip. "'...and neither do they spin...': Christian Communication and the Ethics of Spin." Unpublished dissertation for Diploma in Ministerial Studies, University of Durham, 2001.

Pogoloff, S.M. *Logos and Sophia: The Rhetorical Situation of 1 Corinthians* Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series 134. Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992.

Postman, Neil, and Steve Powers. *How to Watch TV News.* London: Penguin, 1992.

Provisional Attendance Figures for 2002. Church of England Website, 12 January 2004. Accessed 19 March 2007. Available from www.cofe.anglican.org/news/provisional_attendance_figures_for_2002.html.

Ronson, Jon. "Catch Me If You Can." *Guardian,* 21 October 2000, Weekend Section, 10-12.

Savage, Timothy B. *Power through Weakness: Paul's Understanding of the Christian Ministry in 2 Corinthians* Society of New Testament Studies 86. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.

Schrage, Wolfgang. "Leid, Kreuz und Eschaton: Die Peristasenkataloge als Merkmale paulinischer *theologia crucis* und Eschatologie." *Evangelische Theologie* 34, no. 2 (1974): 141-175.

_____. *Der erste Brief an die Korinther.* Zürich und Braunschweig: Benziger Verlag, 1991.

Schultze, Quentin J. *Communicating for Life: Christian Stewardship in Community and Media.* Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2000.

Segal, Alan F. *Paul the Convert: The Apostolate and the Apostasy of Saul the Pharisee.* New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1990.

Shaw, Graham. *The Cost of Authority: Manipulation and Freedom in the New Testament.* London: SCM Press, 1983.

Sheppard, Jackie. *Dealing with the Media.* Didcot: Baptist Union of Great Britain, 1995.

Shorter Oxford English Dictionary. 3rd ed. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977.

Silberberg-Pierce, Susan. "The Many Faces of the Pax Augusta: Images of War and Peace in Rome and Gallia Narbonensis." *Art History* 9 (1986): 306-324.

Silk, Mark. *Unsecular Media: Making News of Religion in America.* Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1995.

Smail, Tom. "The Cross and The Spirit." In *Charismatic Renewal: The Search for a Theology,* ed. Tom Smail, Nigel Wright and Andrew Walker. London: SPCK, 1995.

Smail, Tom, Nigel Wright, and Andrew Walker, eds. *Charismatic Renewal: The Search for a Theology.* London: SPCK, 1995.

Smythe, John, Colette Dorward, and Jerome Reback. *Corporate Reputation: Managing the New Strategic Asset.* London: Century Business, 1992.

Spencer, Nick. *Beyond Belief? Barriers and Bridges to Faith Today.* London: LICC, 2003.

Statistics: A Tool for Mission; A Report by the Statistics Review Group. London: Church House Publishing, 2000.

Stendahl, Krister. *Paul among Jews and Gentiles, and Other Essays.* Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976.

Stickland, Mike. *A Manual for Positive Press Relations: Getting Church News into Local Papers.* [Grantham]: Autumn House, [1996].

Stirewalt, Jr. M. Luther. *Paul, the Letter Writer.* Grand Rapids, Mi.: Eerdmans, 2003.

Stout, Daniel A., and Judith M. Buddenbaum. *Religion and Mass Media: Audiences and Adaptations.* Thousand Oaks, Calif.: SAGE, 1996.

_____. "Media, Religion and "Framing"." *Journal of Media and Religion* 2, no. 1 (2003): 1-4.

Stuhlmacher, Peter. "The Pauline Gospel." In *The Gospel and the Gospels*, ed. Peter Stuhlmacher. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1991.

Sumney, Jerry L. *Identifying Paul's Opponents: the Question of Method in 2 Corinthians* Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series ; 40. Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1990.

Thiselton, Anthony C. "Realized Eschatology at Corinth." *New Testament Studies* 24 (1978): 510-526.

_____. *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* New International Greek Testament Commentary. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2000.

Thomas, Richard. *An Introduction to Church Communication*. Oxford: Lynx, 1994.

Thompson, John B. *The Media and Modernity: A Social Theory of the Media*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995.

_____. *Political Scandal: Power and Visibility in the Media Age*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000.

Thompson, Michael B. "The Holy Internet: Communication Between Churches in the First Christian Generation." In *The Gospel for All Christians*, ed. Richard Bauckham. Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998.

Thrall, Margaret E. "Super-Apostles, Servants of Christ and Servants of Satan." *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 6 (1986): 42-57.

_____. *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*. Vol. 1 The International Critical Commentary. Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994.

Tye, Larry. *The Father of Spin: Edward L. Bernays and the Birth of Public Relations*. New York: Crown, 1998.

"The Vanishing Congregation." *Daily Mail*, 13 January 2004, 15.

WACC. *Statements on Communication by the World Association of Christian Communication*. London: WACC, 1990.

Walker, Andrew. "The Devil You Think You Know: Demonology and the Charismatic Movement." In *Charismatic Renewal: The Search for a Theology*, ed. Tom Smail, Nigel Wright and Andrew Walker. London: SPCK, 1995.

Wanamaker, Charles A. "A Rhetoric of Power: Ideology and 1 Corinthians 1-4." In *Paul and the Corinthians: Studies on a Community in Conflict: Essays in Honour of Margaret Thrall*, ed. Trevor J. Burke and J.K. Elliot, Supplements to Novum Testamentum; v.109. Leiden: Brill, 2003.

Ward, Pete. "Alpha - The McDonaldisation of Religion?" *Anvil* 15, no. 4 (1998): 279-286.

Wedderburn, A.J.M. *The Reasons for Romans*. Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991.

Welborn, L.L. *Politics and Rhetoric in the Corinthian Epistles*. Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 1997.

"When Superman Slips." *idea - The Magazine for Members of the Evangelical Alliance UK*, January-March 2001.

White, John Lee. *The Form and Function of the Body of the Greek Letter: A Study of the Letter-Body in the Non-Literary Papyri and in Paul the Apostle*. Missoula, Mont: Society of Biblical Literature for the Seminar on Paul, 1972.

Williams, Bernard. *Truth and Truthfulness: An Essay in Genealogy*. Princeton, NJ.: Princeton University Press, 2002.

Wimber, John. *The Kingdom of God*. Anaheim, Ca: Mercy Publishing, 1985.

Wimber, John, and Kevin Springer. *Power Evangelism*. London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1985.

Winter, Bruce W. *Philo and Paul among the Sophists* Society of New Testament Studies 96. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997.

_____. *After Paul Left Corinth: The Influence of Secular Ethics and Social Change*. Grand Rapids, Mi: Eerdmans, 2001.

Wire, Antoinette Clark. *The Corinthian Women Prophets: A Reconstruction through Paul's Rhetoric*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990.

Witherington, Ben. *Conflict and Community in Corinth: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians*. Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1995.

_____. *The Paul Quest: the Renewed Search for the Jew of Tarsus*. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1998.

Wood, Derek. *The Barnabas Factor: The Art of Encouragement*. Leicester: IVP, 1988.

Wright, N.T. *The Resurrection of the Son of God* Christian Origins and the Question of God. London: SPCK, 2003.

Wright, Nigel. "The Theology and Methodology of 'Signs and Wonders'." In *Charismatic Renewal: The Search for a Theology*, ed. Tom Smail, Nigel Wright and Andrew Walker. London: SPCK, 1995.

Wünsch, Hans-Michael. *Der paulinische Brief 2Kor 1-9 als kommunikative Handlung. Eine rhetorisch-literaturwissenschaftliche Untersuchung*. Münster: Lit, 1996.

Young, Frances, and David F. Ford. *Meaning and Truth in 2 Corinthians*. London: SPCK, 1987.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1 – Research Interviews

Attendance statistics

Revd Lynda Barley, Head of Research and Statistics, Archbishops' Council

conducted at Church House, Westminster on 7 April 2004

Steve Jenkins, Head of Media Relations, Church of England

conducted at Church House, Westminster on 12 May 2004

Dr Peter Brierley, Executive Director, Christian Research

conducted at Vision House, Eltham on 19 April 2004

Revd Bob Jackson, statistician and author (from 2004 Archdeacon of Walsall)

conducted at Old Alresford Place on 20 January 2004

Alpha News

Mark Elsdon-Dew, Communications Director, Holy Trinity Brompton

conducted at Holy Trinity Brompton on 23 March 2004

Revd Sandy Millar, Vicar, Holy Trinity Brompton (from 2005 Assistant Bishop, Diocese of London)

conducted at Holy Trinity Brompton on 9 June 2004

Appendix 2 – Church of England Attendance Statistics –

Press Release and Overview of Statistics

Provisional attendance figures for 2002 - 12/01/2004

Provisional figures for 2002 show that the average number of children and young people attending church each month increased by 1% over 2001 to 421,000 while the average number attending each week remained static at 228,000. There are signs of growth in church attendance levels in many dioceses among children and young people under 16 years of age, despite a decline in overall attendance.

The dioceses of Manchester, Peterborough, Ripon and Leeds, Southwark, Southwell and Winchester saw increases in each of their Sunday, weekly and monthly attendance levels for children and young people. Of the Church's 44 dioceses, 26* saw increases in one or more measures of church attendance levels for children and young people.

In 2002, the Church of England also asked parish churches to record, over a typical month, for the first time, the number of young people (11 to 25 years of age) attending activities other than worship. Of the 162,000 reported, 125,000 were 'teenagers' aged 11 to 15 years while 37,000 were 'young adults' aged 16 to 25 years. Parishes also reported 41,000 adult volunteers working through the churches with these young people.

Total attendance at church and cathedral worship over a typical month was approximately 1.7 million in 2002, the figure reported by parishes as the highest weekly attendance figure over a typical month. This figure has fallen by 2% since 2001. The number of regular attenders over a typical month was 44% greater than the average number in any particular week and 67% greater than the average on any particular Sunday. For every 30 individuals attending church on a typical Sunday, 50 attend over the whole month.

The average number of church attenders on Sundays (ASA) declined by 4% but remained above 1 million. The average number of church attenders over a typical week (AWA) fell by 3% during the year 2002 but remained approximately 1.2 million. For every 60 people attending church on a typical Sunday another 10 attend during the week.

Parish electoral rolls, listing those entitled to vote at a local church level, are fully revised every six years. The 2002 revision resulted in a decrease of 7% on the last revision in 1996, bringing the Electoral Roll to 1.2 million adults aged 16 years or over.

* The 26 dioceses that saw increases in one or more measures of church attendance levels for children and young people in 2002 were Bradford, Bristol, Chelmsford, Chichester, Derby, Ely, Exeter, Guildford, Lincoln, Liverpool, London, Manchester, Norwich, Oxford, Peterborough, Portsmouth, Ripon and Leeds, Rochester, St Albans, Salisbury, Southwark, Southwell, Truro, Winchester, Worcester, York.

The statistics tables can be viewed at
http://www.cofe.anglican.org/papers/2002ChurchAttendance.pdf

PROVISIONAL : Statistics for Mission 2002

	2000	2001	*Change 2000 to 2001*	**2002**	*Change 2001 to 2002*
Typical Monthly Church Attendance					
All Age					
Average Weekly Attendance (AWA)	1,274,000	1,205,000	-5%	**1,166,000**	-3%
Weekly lowest attendance	885,000	862,000	-3%	**822,000**	-5%
Weekly highest attendance	1,855,000	1,708,000	-8%	**1,676,000**	-2%
Average Sunday Attendance (ASA)	1,058,000	1,041,000	-2%	**1,002,000**	-4%
Sunday lowest attendance	781,000	774,000	-1%	**731,000**	-6%
Sunday highest attendance	1,464,000	1,425,000	-3%	**1,390,000**	-2%
Usual Sunday Attendance (uSa)	n/a	938,000	*n/a*	**916,000**	-2%
Adults					
Average Weekly Attendance (AWA)	1,031,000	976,000	-5%	**937,000**	-4%
Weekly lowest attendance	742,000	727,000	-2%	**690,000**	-5%
Weekly highest attendance	1,451,000	1,332,000	-8%	**1,291,000**	-3%
Average Sunday Attendance (ASA)	878,000	868,000	-1%	**835,000**	-4%
Sunday lowest attendance	660,000	657,000	~	**621,000**	-6%
Sunday highest attendance	1,191,000	1,170,000	-2%	**1,139,000**	-3%
Usual Sunday Attendance (uSa)	n/a	781,000	*n/a*	**765,000**	-2%
Children and Young People (under 16 years of age)					
Average Weekly Attendance (AWA)	243,000	229,000	-6%	**228,000**	~
Weekly lowest attendance	120,000	113,000	-5%	**111,000**	-3%
Weekly highest attendance	455,000	416,000	-9%	**421,000**	1%
Average Sunday Attendance (ASA)	180,000	173,000	-4%	**167,000**	-3%
Sunday lowest attendance	103,000	99,000	-5%	**93,000**	-5%
Sunday highest attendance	300,000	285,000	-5%	**277,000**	-3%
Usual Sunday Attendance (uSa)	n/a	157,000	*n/a*	**151,000**	-4%

Young people attending other activities connected with the church during a typical month*:

young people aged 11-15 years	**125,000**
young people aged 16-25 years	**37,000**
Total aged 11-25 years	**162,000**

Adults working through the church/parish with young people aged 11 and over* **41,000**

Electoral Roll	1,377,000	1,372,000	~	**1,206,000**	-12%

Notes:
~ Increase or decrease of less than 0.5%
2000 weekly attendance figures include mid-week Weddings and Funerals.
All figures are rounded and include cathedrals.
As totals and percentage changes are calculated on unrounded figures they will not always agree with sums and percentages based on the rounded figures.
Since 1972 new electoral rolls have been prepared every 6 years and as a result new electoral rolls were prepared for 2002.
*A special question asked for numbers of young people attending other activities connected with the church, generally over the month of October 2002, and also asked the number of adults working through the church/parish with young people aged 11 and over at that time.

Appendix 3 – Focus Groups

Focus group A – Bournemouth deanery chapter
conducted at St Paul's Church, Throop on 23 September 2004
Participant 1 – male, 35-50,
Participant 2 – male, 35-50,
Participant 3 – male, 50-65,
Participant 4 – male, 50-65,
Participant 5 – female, 20-35,
Participant 6 – male, 50-65.

Focus group B – Winchester curates
conducted at Park Place Retreat Centre on 1 October 2004
Participant 1- female, 50-65,
Participant 2 – male, 35-50,
Participant 3 – female, 50-65,
Participant 4 – male, 35-50,
Participant 5 – female, 50-65,
Participant 6 – male, 35-50.

Focus group C – Woking lay readers of the Church of England Newspaper
conducted at Christ Church, Woking on 14 October 2004
Participant 1 – male, 50-65,
Participant 2 – male, 50-65,
Participant 3 – male, 35-50,
Participant 4 – male, 65+,
Participant 5 – female, 65+,
Participant 6 – male, 35-50.

Focus group D – Bournemouth lay readers of the Church of England Newspaper
conducted at St Saviour's Church, Iford, Bournemouth on 4 November 2004
Participant 1 – female, 50-65,
Participant 2 – male, 65+,
Participant 3 – male, 65+,
Participant 4 – male, 65+,
Participant 5 – male, 65+,
Participant 6 – male, 65+,
Participant 7 – female, 65+.

Appendix 4 – Alpha News March-June 2004

A copy of Issue 33 of *Alpha News* is submitted with this bound thesis.